



CONVENTS.

A REVIEW

OF

TWO LECTURES

ON THIS SUBJECT,

BY THE REV. M. HOBART SEYMOUR.

EMBODYING THE SUBSTANCE OF

A Lecture delivered at the Catholic Chapel,

BATH,

On Sunday, May 23, 1852.

BY

HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL WISEMAN,

ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER.

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CONVENTS.

A REVIEW OF THE REV. M. HOBART SEYMOUR'S LECTURES.

1. *Nunneries. A Lecture delivered in the Assembly Rooms, Bath, on Wednesday, April 21, 1852.* By the Rev. M. HOBART SEYMOUR, M.A. London : Seeleys.
2. *Convents or Nunneries. A Lecture in Reply to Cardinal Wiseman, delivered at the Assembly Rooms, Bath, on Monday, June 7, 1852.* By the Rev. M. HOBART SEYMOUR. Bath : Peach.

IT will be plain to the reader that a connecting link is wanting between the Lectures here quoted. The second purports to be a reply to one which answered the first. This Catholic Lecture has not been published ; but it is our desire now to supply the deficiency ; for we may, at the outset, state, that our present article will substantially contain it, with such further information as more leisure has permitted to be collected, and with such additional details, as Mr. H. Seymour's second lecture requires. It is, indeed true, that the excitement on the subject before us has in a great measure died away. It appeared, a few months ago, that the safety of the kingdom depended upon two measures—the suppression of convents, and the extinction of Maynooth. As the elections approached, it seemed as if pledges on these two subjects were to decide the eligibility of one candidate rather than another. They have passed over ; and we do not believe that any one cares now to count, what number of members respectively think one way, or another, on these two subjects. How is this to be explained ? Is it merely that excitement upon any subject cannot be kept alive beyond a given time ? Or, that this in particular was not a topic which deeply interested the public ? These may be reasons ; but we believe that another, and a more sensible one may be offered. Those who roused for a time the popular passions, in connection with the religious state, have overdone their work. Such attacks as the tongue of Mr. Hobart Seymour, or the pen

of Mr. Pierce Conolly has poured out, are met in the minds of thousands, by realities so contradictory of them, as to neutralise at once their malignant properties. Fortunately England possesses religious institutions in almost every great town, and in many rural districts. Ireland is, thank God, full of them—France, so easily visited, teems with them.

When, therefore, we are told that nuns are a broken-hearted race, all bordering on madness, and any one visiting a convent sees none but smiling countenances, and hears but cheerful voices ; when we learn that every convent is a cage, from which the poor birds long to fly out, and find on inspection, that there are open doors and unbarred windows on every side, and no one to prevent any religious flying to the generous asylum provided for her by Mr. Lacy's Bill—the matron of the nearest workhouse ; when we have it roundly asserted that these establishments absorb enormous fortunes, and snatch everything away from families and friends, and upon enquiry discover, that on the one hand almost every convent is poor, and not one rich, and that, on the other, both the community and the novice have acted most generously in all pecuniary arrangements ; when finally (we blush to write it) a foul charge of immorality is insinuated against these sacred institutions, and yet nobody can become acquainted with them, without finding them composed of persons whose purity of character, holiness of life, devotedness to God, fervour of charity, and sweetness of disposition, find, we will not say no rival, but no parallel in that world of sin, where their enemies would have us seek it ; it follows as a necessary consequence, that the deceit practised is easily, and completely, discovered, and what was done to discredit, turns out to be the sure means of vindication. And hence we have witnessed with delight the phenomenon, that such institutions have received not the slightest check, by all that has been written to disparage them ; their schools and charities are more prosperous than ever, and their noviciates certainly not less filled. Hence also it is not very wonderful, that not only Catholics, but Protestants should continue, chiefly on the continent and in the New World, to send their children for education into establishments, which their own observation has taught them, are the very reverse of what their maligners describe them. But we must enter upon our task more earnestly.

If we are to believe those who are now popularly declaiming upon the subject of religious communities or convents, we should come to the conclusion, that they consist of societies of persons, who can have no possible bonds, which in this world hold persons together, no common interests, sympathies, or affections.

This is what nunneries are said to be. You are to believe that people at some distant period of time, prepared large houses for the reception of a number of persons, who are to be enticed or driven into them, as birds into the snare of the hunter; you are to believe that there is some inexplicable pleasure felt in seeing these poor creatures confined, imprisoned, and pining, and withering away under the effects of their treatment in these living graves; you are to believe that those persons are huddled together in places no better than our common jails, our bridewells, or our workhouses; and that especially the young, are the victims of all the most hideous vices and the cruellest oppressions—that they look upon the older inmates of these prison houses only as persons delighting in inflicting upon them acts of bitter tyranny, whilst the older ones consider the young only as objects upon which their spite and cupidity may be wreaked and satisfied.

And still this system, so full of cruelty and fraud, as you are to believe, must have gone on for hundreds of years, and must have been destroyed under the strokes of revolutions, and yet have revived again, as soon as the power which demolished it had ceased to exist. In France, a few years ago, the revolutionary phrenzy abolished nunneries, and the nuns were scattered in all directions, and into different countries of the world. It was the same in Spain, in Germany, and in some parts of Italy; and yet, by some strange anomaly, by some peculiar and unnatural instinct, so soon as the storm was over, instead of singing with joy that the snare which held them was broken, and they were set free, those nuns came back, and entering within those lofty walls, those barred doors, and grated windows, where they had been the victims of a system of hardship and deceit, there they united, again to build up the old house in which they had spent their early years. And the consequence is, that the country which a few years ago knew not a nunnery, now sends, by means of those establishments, education and charity to all parts, as a fountain springing up by

its own force, and pouring out the waters of benediction—so we may well call it—to the ends of the world.

But we have a fearful aspect given us of the very exterior of these religious houses:—"They have all the same characteristics which we observe in the bridewells, the penitentiaries, and the prisons of our own land. There are the same lofty walls, the same massive gates, the same barred windows, and the same grated openings; the same dull, sombre, cheerless aspect, the same uninviting, repelling, lifeless exterior; the same inaccessibility from without, the same precluded possibility of escape from within."

So writes Mr. Seymour.* But when a conquering army has passed over a land, and thrown open all the prison gates, and set the captives free—who has ever heard of these prisoners returning from the distant lands to which they had escaped, entering again within the prison walls, kissing the floors to which they had been chained, and asking that the massive gates should be again put up? Of this we have never heard in history; of the other we have heard: there are numbers of ancient religious institutions now existing, to which their former inmates returned, after being driven abroad by revolutionary armies and governments, and again united to repair and inhabit the old convents, the beloved abodes of their early years and cherished companions.

We must, however, enter a little more fully into this objection. Mr. Seymour is very pathetic on this subject of hard imprisonment. He enumerates, as we have seen, the resemblances between a convent and a prison. But he has omitted one difference of some importance, that the doors are all locked from the inside. It is not customary to entrust the inhabitants of bridewells with their own keys. But those of a convent are kept by a portress, elected from their own members, by the votes of the community. To the religious themselves is committed the jealous guardianship of their own seclusion.

But putting aside all Mr. H. Seymour's appeal to English Protestant feelings, in his second lecture, let us further observe, that he carefully shuts out from view what is the real subject of proper investigation. Are English or Irish convents, even where enclosure is strictly observed, like prisons or bridewells? If this gentleman's

* First Lecture, p. 5.

object be, as he shows throughout, to excite the feelings of our countrymen, but more still those of our countrywomen, against the conventual system here, should he not have rather proved or illustrated his theory of imprisonment, by something that exists amongst us? Convents must be abolished or visited, because they are prisons, and this is proved by appealing to the bars and walls of Italian or Spanish convents. At the same time it is notorious, that not a single religious house in England, though belonging to what is called an enclosed order,* is secured against easy escape, through windows or doors, should it be desired. Indeed, almost every such house has grounds attached to it, in which the religious walk, without any enclosing wall; and a discontented nun might really run away at no greater risk, than a few scratches in getting through a hedge.

Not only is this the case in England, but it is so equally in France, where religious communities are newly established. At Boulogne, a house of the Visitation has recently been settled: the nuns came from Paris, bought the ground, built a beautiful church and house, themselves had a high wall erected round the whole place. What, then, becomes of Mr. Seymour's impertinent and malignant remarks, about the suspicions cast by such a circumvallation upon the morals of the inmates?† Did we want proof that it was no outward compulsion, but a spontaneous love of separation from the world, which suggested this expensive means of securing it, we could appeal to a large party of English gentlemen and ladies, who lately obtained the rare privilege of breaking the seal of this solitude, and invading its domains. There were, indeed, no barred windows, no iron-bound doors, to prevent a determined egress, but there were abundant symptoms of that happiness and joy which bind faster than iron or brass. Our declaimers forget, that

“ Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage.

* By enclosed orders we mean such as have no external duties that require going beyond the convent precincts, such as visiting the sick.

† Second Lec. 10—14.

If they have freedom in God's love,
And in their souls are free,
Angels alone that soar above
Enjoy such liberty."*

The decree of the Council of Trent, which orders all convents existing out of towns to be brought within their walls, as a protection against the depredations and violence of lawless men,† explains the origin of those severe precautions, which are relaxed in, and dispensed from, in proportion as the power of legal authority is strong.

Mr. H. Seymour, more happy ever in fiction than in truth, in his second lecture, amuses his hearers with a picture of what he says "no doubt this very Cardinal has himself performed," and "what he himself has frequently witnessed;" and it is this. Every time a novice makes her profession, "the poor girl" kneels before this said cardinal, or other officiant, while he, "with his crosier in his hand, and his mitre on his brow," utters a fearful anathema "against any one who shall presume to assist her in making her escape." Now, gentle reader, the whole of this scene, with which Mr. S. plays, like an Indian sorcerer does with a cobra, to the horror of beholders, untwisting it and twisting it again, through a couple of pages, is an ingenious device of a fertile Protestant brain. As we are perfectly sure that neither the Cardinal in question, nor any one else, clothing, or receiving a profession, has ever recited this terrible anathema, so are we equally certain, that Mr. Seymour has never heard it. He has, indeed, read it, and he translates it from the Roman Pontifical, where it is recorded in a service never used, certainly in this country, nor do we believe anywhere abroad, entitled: "De Benedictione et Consecratione Virginum." This is a pontifical ceremony, on the same model as that of an ordination, anciently performed for nuns several years before professed. It is not certainly the form of profession used by the Benedictine, Franciscan, Dominican, Ursuline, Salesian, Carmelite, or Cistercian nuns, nor by those of the Holy Sepulchre, nor by the Sisters of Mercy or Charity, nor by any others that we know.‡ Indeed, Mr.

* We have very slightly altered Lovelace's beautiful lines.

† Sess. xxv. c. v. De Regul. et Monial.

‡ The form of profession of these various orders have been separately printed; some of them in France, some in England.

Seymour, who is so pathetic on the age at which young ladies are allowed to be professed, might have seen, that the rite from which he has transcribed his anathema must be a peculiar one, from the circumstance that, before performing it, the bishop must ascertain that the virgins to be consecrated by it, have all completed their twenty-fifth year: "Pontifex...de earum ætate...singulariter singulas, videlicet, *an annum vigesimum quintum compleverint...diligenter inquirat.*" We must therefore believe that Mr. Seymour has here used a little *ruse*. Not having at hand, or not knowing of, the real forms of clothing or profession used in any order, he has recourse to the Pontifical;—finds an obsolete form which is neither;—and eagerly seizes on its concluding anathema, intended for rough times, and when ecclesiastical censures were the only terror of iron-handed outlaws, or profligate nobles.*

Some can be easily purchased; the rest seen, by persons really wishing to know the truth.

* We may as well put an end to the controversy about this anathema, which made a prominent figure also in the late "aggression" turmoil. The rite of "blessing virgins" given in the Pontifical had ceased to be in general use in the sixteenth century. Barbosa writes: "Et advertas quod consuetudo benedicendi virgines non amplius est in usu." (*Jer. Eccles. Univ. lib. i. c. lxiv.*) And Thomassinus (*Discipl. Par. i. lib. iii. c. xlix.*) gives the reasons in full, for which it had gone into disuse. St. Charles Borromeo tried to revive it, in the sixth council of Milan: but the attempt seems to have failed, for Catalani quotes an authority which shows, that in the diocese of Milan the rite did not prevail. Gavantus cites an answer of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, dated Dec. 5, 1575, declaring "that the consecration of virgins was gone into desuetude, and if it anywhere existed was to be abolished." (*Manuale S. Rituum, Monial. consec.*) Benedict XIII. who was most zealous for the preservation, or revival of old rites, performed this office, both before and after his pontificate. The latter took place in the church of St. Ambrose. Benedict XIV. speaks of the rite as still lingering among the Benedictines. From that time the office has altogether ceased to be used; so much so, that when the Archbishop of Taranto, during the last pontificate, wished to employ it, for consecrating some poor Clares, it was considered necessary to obtain the Pope's sanction for the purpose. This was in 1831.

So much for Mr. Seymour's confident assertion, that the "Cardinal" had often used this rite, and that he himself had heard it, till it still tingles in his ears!

But even so, Mr. Seymour could not but misrepresent. He describes the anathema as a bugbear to the professed, and not to her enemies; she is represented as being haunted for evermore by "the Cardinal with crosier in hand," pronouncing the Latin words of the malediction, and applying them to herself, her father, and every one else, except those against whom they would have been directed, if pronounced. In fact, the words are addressed, not as Mr. S. artfully suggests, "against all persons who shall presume to assist her *in making her escape*," but against those "who draw away these present virgins from the divine service...or who steal their goods." Surely, were any proclamation made against any one who "should draw away persons from her Majesty's navy," it would not be understood to aim at those who should aid or abet their escape, but at those who should endeavour to entice and seduce them away, or to tempt them to break their engagement. The text does not, in the remotest way, insinuate what Mr. Seymour always takes for granted, that a nun is naturally predisposed, or inclined to run away, and that the Church is obliged to use her censures to prevent any one seconding this ardent wish. It clearly denounces the wicked and sacrilegious attempt, to take them away, whether by artifice or violence.

We shall have to say more on the subject of supposed imprisonment in convents; we must resume the thread of our argument, by returning to the condition of foreign religious houses, through which our own institutions are mainly attacked.

It is said then that this is a compulsory life—one to which persons are driven. We will give a few facts, and leave the decision of this point to the reader's own judgment.

There is at Rome an institution—a very large establishment, consisting generally of ladies of the highest rank, and the noblest blood, called the monastery of the 'Tor de' Specchi. It has existed for many years, and at the present time has a fair number of inmates. There are the same terrible bolted doors and barred windows, and high walls; yet the religious take no vows, and hold intercourse with their friends. On days of festival the doors are thrown open, and those of the public who choose, walk through their beautiful halls, to attend their religious offices. For many years past, only two of the inmates have left the institution; one of them was within our own recollection;

she left to be married, and she was not looked upon with scorn in consequence, but was received in society in the manner befitting her high character and station. Where is the compulsion then? Yet we have here all the outward marks of enclosure that have been referred to.

Another remarkable instance. The revolutionary Government of Spain did not suppress convents altogether; but it took away all their property, and subjected their inmates to great privations and hardships. We have heard from the mouth of one who had witnessed it, a case of much distress and misery, the effects of this injustice. A lady was on the eve of profession, and had paid her dowry, which formed her small patrimony into a bank, to be ready for the day of her profession. An order came out from the Government, just at that moment, forbidding any more religious vows, and seizing on all convent property. The convent was not suppressed, but all its funds were taken from the bank, and with it the above-named sum, so that the novice was not only forbidden to make her profession as a nun, but was also deprived of all means of returning to the world. The Spanish Government, like all revolutionary governments, encouraged the idea, if it did not believe it, that the religious life was a life of constraint. Therefore, it thought to get the approval of philanthropists, by opening the doors of the conventual establishments; and at the same time blind the world to the iniquity of the robbery committed upon their inmates. In taking all the property belonging to the convents, they settled a miserable allowance upon each nun. She was to have eight-pence per day if she remained in the convent, and ten-pence per day if she left it. A temptation was thus directly held out to abandonment of this supposed unwilling life, and a return to a longed-for home. Now, we have inquired in many cities in Spain, and we could scarcely hear of an instance in which a nun had left her convent. Only two, we were assured, had yielded in all Spain. But the most remained there; there we visited them; we entered the heart of convent after convent, and there we found them in the poverty and misery to which they had been reduced, but still contented and happy, and resigned to the will of God. How was it then, that they had not availed themselves of this opportunity, of being released from a system under which they were the victims of constraint, cruelty, and fraud?

But in Cadiz the reformers did more. The magistrates went to all the convents; and having thrown open the doors, made a speech to the nuns; as some seem to think should be done now. He invited them to leave the nunneries; he offered them Government protection, in case they should do so; and promised that no one should molest them. But what was the result of all this? Not a nun went forth. Does this, then, look like a system of compulsion? Does it look like a system where persons are driven into, and kept in, prison-houses, in misery and torment, from which in vain they wish to escape?

To this statement, when embodied in the Cardinal's lecture, Mr. H. Seymour thus replied:—

“And, to illustrate this, he mentioned, in rather a romantic way, a somewhat unromantic story of certain Spanish nuns, to whom the magistracy threw open the gates of their nunneries, and offered them either eight-pence a day if they chose to remain in the building, or ten-pence a day if they chose to depart; and the worthy nuns, shrewd and thrifty women as they were, thought they could do better with eight-pence a day with a good house over their heads, than upon ten-pence a day, and find themselves; but while the Cardinal dilated thus romantically on the story of the Spanish nuns, he omitted to mention—no doubt it was one of those lapses of memory to which we public speakers are sometimes liable, and which give us the appearance occasionally of a want of ingenuousness—he omitted to state the trifling incident, that on the very occasion of those doors being opened by the Spanish Cortes, no less than two hundred and ten—that was the number officially returned—two hundred and ten nuns embraced their freedom, renounced their vows, left the convent, and became secularized!”—p. 11.

Now the coarseness and flippancy of this passage bear no comparison with its untruth. The opening of the convents by the Spanish Government took place on the 29th of July, 1837, and to this the Cardinal had alluded. The retirement of 210 nuns—not to renounce their vows, as Mr. Seymour asserts, but to live at home under them—occurred in 1820, by express permission of the Pope. But a Spanish nobleman, a member of the Senate, and a man of unimpeachable character, upon being requested by us to furnish us some statistics on this subject, without informing him for what purpose, has given us a statement, which we are sure our readers will not grudge our here inserting *in extenso*. It is as follows:—

“Nuns existing in Spain according to Official Census.

“1787.—1122 religious houses with 24,348 Professed nuns.

1,017 Novices.

925 Seculars (boarders.)

715 Children.

448 Lay Sisters.

4,533 Servants.

31,986 Females.

1,644 Men servants.

33,630

“1797.—1075 houses with 23,111 Professed nuns.

896 Novices.

603 Seculars (boarders.)

769 Children.

464 Lay Sisters.

4,366 Servants.

30,209 Females.

1,191 Men servants.

31,400

“In 1800 there existed in the convents 33 630 persons, including servants, which would be about equal to 24,000 professed nuns. The particulars cannot be obtained here.

“In September 1820, the Supreme Pontiff authorised the Apostolic Nuncio, to grant permission to become seculars, to such religious, both men and women, as should solicit it on just causes. Only 210 nuns took advantage of this permission, as is certified by documents presented in the Cortes, that is to say, *one* in each 115.

“This small number was composed principally of the old and infirm, who went to live with their families; the rest preferred remaining in their convents, although reduced to the most extreme poverty, all their property having been applied to the use of the public treasury.

“On the 29th July, 1837, all convents, both of men and women, were abolished, the nuns having permission to remain living in their convents if they so desired. The government which took possession of all their effects, except their clothes, was to allow them a pension of four reales (nine-pence halfpenny,) daily, but many years passed without any payment being made, on account of the difficulties of the treasury, and until the year 1850 the regular payment did not commence.

“The poverty to which the nuns were reduced became extreme, but nevertheless very few left the convents. Public charity, moved by such destitution, formed in Madrid, and in all the principal towns,

societies of ladies, who took upon themselves to collect alms, and to distribute them. Ladies of the highest rank entered with great zeal into this charitable service, and by this means alone the nuns have been supported in their convents, still in much poverty, and with the assistance of their own industry in works befitting their sex, which were sold by the ladies, being much prized.

"I have not been able to find any data respecting the number of nuns existing at the time of the suppression, in 1837, nor of those who since that time may have left the convents, but in the treasury accounts of 1850, we find the sum of 16,503,265, reales de vellon, (£165,000) for the payment of the nuns' pensions then existing in the convents, which, at the rate of 1460 reales each, would be equal to 11,300 nuns, voluntarily remaining cloistered, after thirteen years of absolute liberty.

"In 1800, as we have already said, the number of professed nuns was 24,000. From the year 1820 the entrance of new ones was suspended. We do not know what the numbers were at the time of that suspension, but they would doubtless be fewer, because from the beginning of the century there had been reason to doubt the safety of monastic property, and this would naturally discourage fresh entrances; since families would not be disposed to risk the loss of the portion paid to the convent, the nuns remaining in poverty, as was eventually the case.

"But supposing that in 1837 there were 20,000 which certainly is above the mark, the deaths that must have occurred from 1837 to 1850, would have reduced the number at least a third part, certainly not less, considering the age of many, and their physical and moral sufferings, so that the existence at that period of 11,300 in the convents is an incontestible demonstration of their attachment to the poor and laborious life of a religious.

"It is very remarkable that amongst those who remained were to be found members of rich families, who offered them in their houses all sorts of comforts, but which they would not accept, choosing to remain with their poor sisters. I am acquainted with several such.

"By the late concordat admission has been given to a certain number in each convent. Many candidates presented themselves instantly, several being of the highest classes of society. The heroic conduct of the Spanish nuns during the years so trying to them, from 1820 to 1850, has augmented the respect and admiration in which they have always been held by their countrymen, and they may well be taken as models of religious virtue."

But the question will be put, what security has "the British public," that compulsory entrance into the religious state, or unwilling residence in it, does not exist in this country? There is this security, that we are men—human beings. Catholics we may be, and from some, such a fact

is sufficient to bring down upon us torrents of vituperation ; but you who live amongst us, do you believe that we have not the ordinary affections of other men ? Would you, fathers, sacrifice your daughters to a system of cruelty and vice ? No ! Has not the Italian or the Spanish father, then, think you, the same feelings for his children as yourselves ? Mothers ! would you—knowing the character of these insidious, deceitful, awful priests—would you allow them to drag your daughter to a convent, and to immerse her in a prison, when you knew she was only going as a victim, and not as a bride ? Why, then, should the Italian or the Spanish mother do so ? One is here almost tempted to use harsh words. There is in the national feeling of our country that which we fear, unless it be repented of, will bring down the scourge of heaven upon us : there is the proud and supercilious spirit which sets up ourselves, our interests, and our opinions, above all the world besides—the feelings of the haughty Pharisee, treating all others as poor publicans, whilst we alone are the great and the glorious before God ! It might be really well for us to humble ourselves a little more—and not to set ourselves up as being alone the mediums through which are transmitted those instincts and affections which God placed in the bosoms of our first parents. If there are fathers and mothers in Italy, in Spain, or in France, they are the safeguards against our being carried away by such a system of fraud, and oppression, as is popularly attributed to Catholics.

Can any one believe that the numbers of cases which must have occurred, tens of thousands of young creatures dragged away, or inveigled away, from their parental hearths—that such a crying evil could exist in any country, and the Government of that country not interfere ? Would there be no bewailing parents, think you ; would there be no public cry demanding justice ?

Where, then, is it we find these things ? Oh, in books against the Jesuits ! Priests or Jesuits, where think you they can obtain the magic influence, whereby they can steel the hearts of mothers, aye, and the brains of fathers to such a state of things ? Good reader, we live in a practical age ; do let us apply a little of our practical sense to this much misrepresented subject.

For God's sake, what interest could any priest or bishop in the world have, in seeing thirty or forty persons impri-

soned together in the depths of a convent? What pleasure could we have in witnessing what we are told is the pretended smile of happiness, but in reality, is only the half-demented look, which is said to be the almost certain effect of conventual life? You meet us in society—you see and know us as men; but we should be worse than evil spirits did we love to see, sanction, or promote such things as these.

At any rate you will allow that we are superstitious. If you deny that we have the common feeling of human beings, you will allow that we are—to excess, if you like—attached to our Church, and believe in her authority. Now, the greatest authority in her is the Council of Trent; and that council, in the 18th chapter, 25th session, expressly pronounces in the most formal and emphatic manner, excommunication—not excommunication pronounced by sentence, after the deed, but excommunication incurred by the very act—against any person who shall by force compel, or who by any means shall induce, any female to enter a convent against her own will. The same excommunication is pronounced against any person who shall give the veil to such a female, administer to her the vows, or who shall even assist in the ceremony, if she is not a willing party.

Now, if we are devoid of human feeling, you will give us credit for obedience to the authority of our Church, and do you think any priest or bishop, would bring down upon his head the curse of a general council, by receiving into a convent one who was not known to come of her own free will?

But, Protestant tract readers are studiously kept in the dark as to the manner in which persons are admitted into these religious houses.

When any application is made to any religious community for admission, the applicant is first admitted in the form of what is called a postulant. She does not wear the dress of the order; but she is allowed to attend its religious services, and is, in fact, rather there as a visitor than a resident, and before the time of her probation as a postulant expires, which is often as much as six months, she may at any time she chooses go forth from the nunnery, and there is no power whatever to prevent her. When this period of probation has expired, there is a scrutiny into her character and conduct, and the inmates decide

by ballot, whether she is admissible or not ; not only whether she possess the requisite virtue and religious dispositions, but whether her temper and disposition are such as to fit her to be their associate for life. And we may here observe, that not above one-half of those who are applicants are able to pass through this ordeal, so as to obtain admission into the convent. If the inmates decide that the postulant may be admitted, the bishop is obliged to go in person, or to send his deputy, and his deputy is always a high ecclesiastical personage—and to strictly inquire, not only whether violence, or other harsh means have been used, but whether there have been any measure taken to *induce* her to enter the convent, or even whether her parents have persuaded her to do so ; and she is invited to confide in him, and is promised every protection, in case she shall have been induced or compelled by any person to seek the conventual life. And the examiner is bound to reject her, if he finds that any undue influence has been used over her.

But this is not all. If the bishop or his deputy passes her, she is then only admitted to what is called her clothing. She only receives a part of the religious habit, and is placed under the instruction of a nun, called the mistress of novices, in order to become fitted for her future course of life ; for she has now become what is termed a novice. This state lasts one, two, and in some establishments even more years. During this period she is still free to leave the convent whenever she thinks proper, and can order the gates to be thrown open to her on any morning. And, again, before she enters the last state, and takes the veil she is examined once more, by the bishop or other external superior, is ballotted for once more, and her mind is searched minutely to ascertain whether she is a perfectly willing party ; and if in all this she is found to be admissible, she is allowed to become one of the community ; if not, she is rejected. Now these precautions with excommunication to back them, are surely sufficient guarantees against the asserted compulsory character of the life in these establishments.

Against all this line of argument Mr. H. Seymour strongly protests, and his answer to it is to the following effect. St. Alphonsus Liguori, in his treatise entitled “*The Nun Sanctified*,” gives examples of nuns who had been put into convents originally against their will, and

addresses religious similarly circumstanced. This proves, therefore, “the fact, that young women are sometimes put into these establishments against their own inclinations.” (p. 26.)

This answer proceeds upon the supposition, that an assertion had been made to the contrary—that is, that such a case *never* happens. Such a line of argument had never been dreamt of. No one would ever have been so extravagant, or so rash, as to assert that the greatest possible precaution will effectually bar the commission of evil. No one could have been so illogical as to make a general negation, incapable of proof. But such was not the controversy in hand. Mr. Seymour had attacked the entire conventual system, as one of frightful imprisonment, of durance, and of consequent misery. It was shown that this could not be, because there were strong securities against this, first in parental feelings, secondly in the absence of all motive, thirdly in the decrees and censures of the Church, and fourthly in the examinations, probations, and precautions required by ecclesiastical law. These all proved that the religious houses could not possibly be, what that gentleman piteously asserted them systematically to be, cages for captive birds, prisons for unwilling bondswomen. This he considers he disproves, by showing that “sometimes” all these precautions fail, and parental cruelty, or girlish whims, baffle the ingenuity, and defeat the charity, of the Church, and cause the victim of either to fall into a wrong and painful position. Is this any answer?*

Suppose that a Catholic were to assert, that the clergy of the Establishment were all men without vocation, or call to such a state, led to it only as to a profession or means of living, by the prospects of ease and wealth, or dignity, which it holds out; and Mr. Seymour were to

* It may not be without its use to mention here, that upon enquiry we find that almost every convent in or near London, (we can answer for nine,) and many in the country, are regularly attended by protestant medical men; it will be remembered that in the lato Norwood case, two protestant medical attendants came to bear witness; as did a protestant surgeon of high respectability in a case of atrocious calumny against another convent. This proves how little fear exists of conventual mysteries being revealed, and how easily the inmates can communicate with the outward world.

answer, by showing what study and preparation that system demanded from the candidates for its ordination; would any one imagine him to assert by his answer, that not one single ambitious or worldly-minded youth got through that trial? We are ready to admit, that such cases as St. Alfonso alludes to, do occur: the question is, are they the rule, or the exception? Read the very work in question. Do not the very passages quoted by Mr. Seymour prove that in the Saint's eyes, and in his experience, which was great in the matter, the unhappy or discontented nun (and even she is not one so necessarily from a compulsory profession,) was the black sheep of the convent, "distrusted and despised" by the rest of the community? (p. 28.) Could this be, if all the rest were the same? "St. Francis of Sales," we are told in another extract, was "asked his opinion concerning a person who had become a nun against her will." (p. 27.) How excessively stupid, if both he and his interrogator knew, that this was the case with hundreds--the common way, in fact, of all becoming nuns! Let any one run through the four volumes of this saint's letters, and read the numbers of them that are addressed to religious women, and judge for himself, if *he* believed them all to be such against their will, or considered that the chief habitual excellence of the nun was, to make a virtue of necessity.

But let us further remark, that any one reading St. Alphonsus's, or St. Francis's advice to the exceptional nun, who is not happy, will observe that it is only *advice*; and they do not say that she is bound to act upon it, if she has right on her side.

We must therefore distinguish two cases, which in the lectures before us are always mixed up together. Confining ourselves to a rash entrance into religion, and excluding mere discontent from peevishness, ill-temper, or bad health, which would probably have made home unhappy, we may attribute this to two causes, either the undue influence, or even constraint, of parents, or else a rash and inconsiderate rushing into the religious state without a vocation.

Now as to the first, let us hear the same St. Alphonsus, when he is not merely delivering spiritual advice, but is expounding the rights of religious, as recognised by Catholic theologians. He is answering the question:

“ what is requisite for the validity of a religious profession,” and his third condition is as follows.

“ Thirdly, that the profession be spontaneous, not forced by grievous fear, such as would be that of imprisonment, deprivation of sustenance, if he would not consent to make profession. Also a reverential fear, not indeed alone, but accompanied by the repeated importunity of requests, caresses, and commands, or by the grievous offence and long-continued indignation of relations ; with the addition of threats of refusing maintenance if he quit the religious state. For these *separately*, and still more conjointly, taking into account the position of an unlettered and timid person, may strike into him a grounded fear, *and render the profession null*, as Layman teaches.

“ Whence the following cases are thus solved :

“ 1. He who has made a profession null from want of any of the above conditions, unless he afterwards, tacitly or expressly, shall have ratified it, can leave the religious state, and marry : although for the sake of avoiding scandal, he must declare the cause of his leaving, and if it be brought before the *external forum*,” (beyond the confessional) “ he must prove the defect of his profession. This must be done within five years from the day of profession ; after that term he is not listened to, according to the Council of Trent ; for he is presumed to have, in the meantime, ratified it.

“ 2. But if he should know that that presumption of law (in his case) is false, because either through ignorance of the impediment, or prevented by grievous fear or any other just cause, he had been unable to appeal within the fifth year, or the impediment be essential and perpetual, or at least lasts beyond the fifth year, he may put in his claim after that period is elapsed, and ought to be heard in judgment, at least extraordinarily, or to be put back into possession of right to do so ; as argues.....Barbosa, who quotes many others ; and unless something else stands in the way, he may run away, as Layman teaches.....

“ Here we must add what has been recently enacted by His Holiness Benedict XIV., in his Bull, beginning *Si datum hominibus*, where it is decided ; 1. That whatever is decreed about religious men embraces equally women, where the same cause is in force : 4. That the cause of nullity may be entertained, after the five years, if the religious have seriously made his claims within that period.”—*Theol. mor.* L. v. c. i. Dub. 2.

From this an impartial person will see, that the Church, not content with precautionary, has taken also strong corrective, measures, against parental, or family constraint. The vows are null, if made under it ; and redress is to be granted, upon complaint, even after a long period of acquiescence. But is this, we shall be asked a practical case ?

We answer, that it is. It is a very rare one certainly, as we have already shown; though no doubt the ladies who sign petitions against convents, think it *ought* to be a very common one. Only one has come in our way; and in that case liberation was at once obtained from the religious vow, and the lady allowed to enter into wedlock.

The second case which we have mentioned, is that where no outward influence has driven to the religious state, but where the choice has been made rashly or inconsiderately, yet freely. The readers of romances are familiar with the idea. A young, imaginative creature, disappointed in a sincere affection; a romantic enthusiast dwelling on ideal perfection, and craving after "the penitive cell," and its "heavenly contemplation;" an early mourner, drooping under the loss of every one dear, and coldly looked upon in a borrowed home; such are supposed to be the staple of supply to the conventual life, where it is embraced by choice. Now no doubt, such characters, not over common in every day life, may be found occasionally among applicants for admission into a convent; and it is a possibility, that upon such a state of feeling, especially the last, may be engrafted, by grace, a true vocation, and the peace and charity discovered in the cloister may wean effectually from the world to God. But we can have no hesitation in saying, that such motives and such characters as are above described, will not rub through the hard testing of the noviceship. In this there is no room for silly romance or maudlin melancholy; all is brisk, active and most homely. The melancholy young lady will find herself amidst smiling faces, and will occasionally have to stand the volley of a hearty laugh, and find no time for weeping: and the romantic one may have to wash up the dishes, or to read very prosaic books upon the necessity of curbing the imagination, and repressing foolish sensibilities; and before the end probably of the first probation, each must have got rid of her idiosyncrasy, and become a common-sense person, or she may make sure of being black-balled at the scrutiny for her admission. The best security then against an ill-judged entrance into the religious life lies in the ordeal of the noviciate, and in the right of self-protection against a probable disturber of peace and happiness, on the part of the community.

But now let us look at the supposed case, in another and

more rightful view. Mr. Seymour evidently considers it a great hardship of the conventual state, that a nun, who has deliberately, though still perhaps rashly, made her vows, should not be allowed by the Church, at once to return to the world. "And if," he writes, "in after years, perhaps at the thought of friends, and family, and home—her own sweet, sweet home—feeling that there is no place like home—she may wish to withdraw, * * * yet the moment she thinks of these things, &c." How touching and pathetic all this; or rather how childish and mawkish! Let us test it.

Suppose a lady, not yet out of the flower of youth, came to Mr. Seymour, as a supposed minister of God, and laid before him her sad case, and asked his advice. Her story is briefly as follows. When very young, not above eighteen, she was asked in marriage by one rich and noble. Her parents, impoverished though of high lineage, and burthened with a large family, could give her no fortune, and strongly urged her to consent. The mother wept, the father frowned, when she hesitated. Then she began to look at the offer as her only hope for life; when parents should be no more, she would have a home; in the meantime she would have position and abundance—perhaps the power to do good. She makes up her mind—she consents—she deliberately accepts her state as irrevocable. St. George's Hanover Square, a ducal hero, and a splendid equipage, figure for a day in the *Morning Post*, in conjunction with her name, and her bridegroom's; and then the vision of dazzling hope melts gradually away. An embarrassed estate, and encroaching debts; extravagance and meanness combined in all domestic arrangements; a sullen temper and bursts of passion alternating with one another; coldness and indifference requiting love; affections evidently elsewhere placed, and easy levity everywhere but at home; no heart, no refinement, no head perhaps, mated to a gentle, delicate and cultivated spirit; such has proved to her, the holy state of wedlock, sanctioned by her church, blessed by its ministers. The golden ring which they had placed upon her finger was an iron manacle riveted on her arm—till death. And now, "in after years, at the thought of friends, and family, and home—her own sweet, sweet home—feeling that there is no place like home—she wishes to withdraw" from a life which has become intolerable, and comes to ask advice.

What must that advice be? That, hard as may be her fate, and severe her sufferings, there is no release—but by a death. “It is true,” would be said to her, “that such a life as you are doomed to is one of misery, gloom, and unhappiness: but when you chose your state for better or for worse, deliberately, and willingly, though not without influence being exercised over you, you yourself cut off all remedy, and you must bear like a Christian, the consequences of what you took on yourself.” “But is it possible that the Almighty can have left no power to loose so cruel a bond? or—can have made any condition of one of his creatures so irremediable?” “Yes,” must be the reply. “You have bound yourself by a *vow*, before God, to remain the faithful companion of that man for life, and you must make the best of your condition. Sanctify it by patience, and meekness; hallow it by prayer; and God will give you strength, and will lighten your heavy yoke; and then life is short, and you will receive before long the crown of your patient suffering.” Would not this be acting exactly as St. Alphonsus did? Would it not be the right way to deal with “a discontented, or unhappy” wife? Does not Mr. Seymour well know, that there are plenty such, not only among the poor, but among the rich and noble? Yes far more, who have been almost compelled to marry without affection, or who have married through silly caprice, or ambition, or worldliness, and are unhappy, than there are in proportion, unhappy nuns from compulsion or indiscretion. What would not the former give, to have been allowed, like the latter, a year or two of noviceship in wedlock, before pronouncing an irrevocable engagement!

But of course, we shall at once be told, that there is a great difference between the two states—that God has appointed the one, and man the other. Here in reality lies the deep principle, on which the entire controversy rests. The enemies of the religious state *assume*, that it is a mere human invention; we assert that is the carrying out of a divine injunction. Now, we have just as much right to *assume* our view, as they have theirs. Nor let the reader become alarmed, lest we lead him into a theological discussion on the subject. We content ourselves with referring to our divines, or even higher to the sacred Word of God, to the strong and clear declarations of our Lord, or of St. Paul; all of which of course weigh as

nothing with your general Bible-Protestants, who take as much or as little of that word as suits their views ; whose first principle of interpretation is, that any text which serves Papists must be disregarded, or means the contrary ; and who cannot for a moment conceive, that Master or Disciple can have ever, for a moment, taught anything, which would be distasteful to the enlightened English public, or not conformable to the heaven-made-easy ideas of assembly-rooms religionists.

That Mr. Seymour easily puts aside such high considerations of the subject, and takes it for granted, that what people were doing when the deluge overtook them, and will be doing when the doom of fire comes down,* “marrying and giving in marriage” was, and is, and ever will be the great end of man’s creation, life, and death, the highest of his destinies, the sublimest of his duties, is matter of course. Listen to the teachings of his second lecture :

“For in the beginning God made them male and female ; in the beginning he made them man and wife ; in the beginning he desired them to increase and multiply amidst the purity, and the innocence, and the holiness, and the happiness of Eden. But the Cardinal steps in with another and a different arrangement, and he would separate the man from the woman, and separate the woman from the man. The Church of Rome has adopted the principle that celibacy is more holy than marriage, and that married persons, as such, are not so holy as unmarried persons, as such. And, accordingly, it is held by many in the Church of Rome that the true atmosphere of religion is solitude and retirement ; and that if we would attain to the highest flights of perfection, it must be in the cell of the hermit, or the cave of the anchorite ; and as this would not be seemly or possible with women, so we must seek the loftiest flights of holiness, and the lowest depths of humility, in those women who retire to the silence, and the solitude, and the devotion of the cloister. It is not my intention to enter upon any argument on this subject, as I really feel it would be a waste of your time and my own. But I would observe that it has long been the glory of England,”—P. 8.

We must really fill up the sentence as it should be. “It has long been the glory of England to take what part of Scripture we please into our mouths : and therefore resting on the texts of Genesis, which suit us, I will not insult you, by supposing that you hold with St. Paul, that ‘he who giveth not his virgin in marriage doth better’ than

* Matt. xxiv. 37.

he who doth, or that 'the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord' better than the married, 'that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.' ""*

Suffice it, then to say, that the Catholic Church *does* believe in these purer doctrines of the New Law; and while we leave to Mr. H. Seymour the marrying and giving in marriage people, as the class with which he would prefer to be found when the fire of judgment comes, we will beg to be associated with the wise virgins, who watched for their master, with well-trimmed lamps.

Hence in the Church are two states, equally forming a perpetual bond;† the married and the religious. For as St. Alphonsus writes, in the chapter above quoted:—"Nam status religionis cum matrimonio æquiparatur." And so the argument returns; If a Mormon, who denies the indissolubility of marriage, attack one of these anti-ascetics, on the subject, he is obliged to deny, that there is any injustice in binding a person irremediably to a state voluntarily undertaken, though even the choice should turn out to be the source of intense and prolonged misery. God, who cannot be unjust, has made that the condition of a contract ratified before Him. How then if made with Himself?‡

But this parallel between the matrimonial and the religious state, will serve to furnish an answer to another of Mr. Seymour's grievances, as the champion of poor oppressed nuns. We must unite two or three short passages of his answer.

"Now the Cardinal, on this occasion, committed one of those omissions to which I have referred—to which public speakers are so very liable. He told us, indeed, of the postulancy, but omitted to tell us at what age the postulancy might commence; and he

* 1 Cor. vii. 38, and 34.

† With this difference between the two, that the Church herself can never dissolve the one, but may free from the other. The bond of marriage is therefore more inexorably severe; and yet *all* allow that a merciful God has prescribed it.

‡ Or what advice would Mr. Seymour have given to a youth vowed to God, by his parents, as was Samuel by his mother, under the law? Was that not a harder condition, than where the obligation was voluntarily assumed at a mature age? It is clear that men, like this prophet, or Sampson, were held bound by the vows pronounced for them.—(1 Reg. i., 11. Jud. xiii., 5.)

told us of the noviciate, but omitted to tell us at what age the noviciate might commence ; and he told us of taking the final vows, but omitted to tell us at what age the final vows might be taken.”—P. 14.

“The Council of Trent is sufficiently explicit. In the 25th session, and at the 17th chapter, I thus read:—

“A girl more than *twelve years of age*, wishing to take the habit of a nun, is to be examined by the ordinary, and again before making her profession.....So that we have it here expressly stated, in the canons of the Council of Trent, that a girl *twelve years of age* may take ‘the habit,’—that is, the vestizione, or commence the noviciate.”—p. 16.

“We learn that the noviciate may begin so early as *twelve years of age*, and the profession may be made at *sixteen years of age*.”—p. 17.

“A young, tender, innocent, generous, confiding, loving, warm-hearted girl—of FIFTEEN (!) or sixteen.”—Ib.

“He did not tell us that the postulancy, being six months before the noviciate—that six months before the twelve years of age this postulancy begins—*that is at eleven years and a half*; that the child is free till twelve, and that then commences the noviciate, which was sometimes four years; that is, commencing at twelve and ending at sixteen: and so the whole period of her freedom is from *eleven and a half to sixteen years of age*, when we all know the mind of such a girl is plastic, and can be moulded by any one around her to desire, or to wish, or to do almost anything which those who are around her may desire.”—p. 18.

“Gentle reader! we must pause for breath. Never, even in a Protestant attack, have we read a more artful tissue of untruths, for we can call them nothing else, so woven together, as to bewilder any one, who has not the means at hand to unravel the web of sophistry, and false deductions. Bear with us, if we go into this matter, at some length.

And first, what would be the natural conclusion of any one reading or hearing these passages, gems of falsehood, set in a text of pathos, and sensibility that greatly enhances their appearances? Why simply this: that as a matter of course, the regular system of making a nun is as follows. A poor child of *eleven and a half* is made a postulant; at *twelve* she is clothed; she then makes a noviceship of four years, and at sixteen is admitted to her vows. Now the whole of this is untrue—almost every proposition of it, considered not merely as a statement of what is usual, but as a possibility.

We will begin by observing that the Council of Trent does not suppose four years of noviciate, *but only one*; (Cap. xv.) so that according to Mr. Seymour's view, the novice ought to be professed at *thirteen*. Yet this would be invalid, according to the same chapter. Let us then state facts.

1. No profession is valid until the *completion* of the sixteenth year, "*non fiat ante decimum sextum annum completum*," which is in reality the *seventeenth* year.

2. The Council of Trent says not a word about a girl beginning her noviciate at *twelve*, but only provides for her being examined at that age, if she express a desire of becoming a nun. She cannot enter her noviciate before her *fifteenth year complete*, that is till she be in her *sixteenth* year: a year before profession. This was formally decided by the S. Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, by a decree of May 23, 1659, given in full by Nicolius,* and referred to by Monacelli, who tells us he had seen the original in the office of the congregation;† and adds that since its publication, no one could be admitted into the noviciate before her fifteenth year complete.

3. Consequently, all the fiction of a postulancy at *eleven and a half* falls to the ground, and has not had any existence out of Mr. H. Seymour's fertile imagination; and we trust that any tears shed over these tender plants, supposed to be drooping in the religious conservatory, will be dried up when the truth is learnt.‡

But we shall be asked by many, is not the seventeenth year of life too early to make choice of such a state? We have already observed that the state of marriage, and that of religious profession, have been considered parallel in the Church. And hence the laws

* *Lucubrat. Canon. l. iii. tit. xxxi. De Reg.*

† *Formular. Pa. i. tit. ix. form. 7.*

‡ A friend has suggested an important consideration. Mr. S. takes the lowest *possible* age of profession as the *actual* one; and upon that bases his declamations against the religious state. Now by the law of England, *twelve* is the age of valid marriage on the female side. What would Mr. S. think of a foreigner who should abuse English marriages, on the assumption that they always took place at the earliest age possible, *twelve*? Yet this is precisely the train of Mr. Seymour's reasoning. Can it be called upright and honest?

which regulated the one, have usually ruled the other. Mr. Seymour's audience, no doubt, thought that the whole conventual system is very modern, beginning at least, as he intimates, in feudal times. Our brief statements on the age of profession will prove the contrary.

In the third century, "the Virgins" formed a recognized and distinct class among the faithful. St. Cyprian then calls them "the more illustrious portion of the flock of Christ." (1) And the same martyr and bishop tells us, that once enrolled by the bishop, no virgin could go back from her choice; (2) and that, though they lived at home, they were entirely removed from the society of men. (3) They were maintained from the daily oblations of the faithful. (4) In the fourth century, in Rome, the Virgins dedicated to God still continued often to reside at home, given up to prayer and fasting, as St. Jerome informs us, (5) but wearing a particular dress, and a distinctive head-dress called the *flammeum*, being of purple woollen stuff, (6) which the bishop put on, with solemn prayers; (7) and they had a place set aside for them in church, cut off by a boarding from the women's part, and surrounded on the other sides by a wall, on which St. Ambrose tells us were inscribed precepts for the preservation of chastity. (8) But in this age, both in the west, and in the east, convents for women, as well as monasteries for men were established. For their existence in Rome, St. Jerome is a witness; (9) in Milan St. Ambrose; (10) in Africa St. Augustine; (11) in Gaul Sulpicius Severus. (12) As to the east, St. Anthony founded a convent in Egypt, over which he placed his own sister; (13) St. Pachomius one in Palestine, which was governed also by *his* sister. (14) St. Basil

(1) "Illustrior portio gregis Christi." *De habitu Virginis*, n 410. ed. Bened.

(2) Ep. lx. *ad episc. Numid. Conc. Eliberit. A.* 303.

(3) Ep. lxii. *ad Pompon.*

(4) *Cornel. P. epist. ap. Euseb. H. E.* l. vi. c. 42.

(5) *Epist. ad Eustoch. de virgin. servanda.*

(6) *Id. ad Gaudent. Optat. Milev. de Schis. Donat.* l. ii. c. vii.

(7) *Hier. ad Demetr. Conc. Carthag.* iv. c. 91.

(8) *Exhortat. ad Virg. lapsam.* c. vi. (9) *Epitaph. Marcellæ.*

(10) *Ubi sup.* c. vii. (11) *Possidon. in vita.* c. ult.

(12) *De Vita S. Martini, Dial.* ii.

(13) *S. Athanas. in vita S. Antonii* c. xxix. (14) *Vit. Patr.* c. 28.

established many such houses in Cappadocia and Pontus ;(15) and this was so far from being considered a blot upon his memory, or an act opposed to God's constitution of human nature, or to Genesis, or an evidence of a cruel disposition, that it is made a special topic of praise by the poet, orator, bishop and saint, St. Gregory Nazianzen,—and we are told, that in one of these religious houses, there were, a few years later, two hundred and fifty nuns.(16) If the reader would look back at our number for December 1843, he will find an interesting account of St. Gregory of Nyssa's last visit to his sister St. Macrina, a nun dying in her cell, and found after her death to have a little cord round her neck, from which hung an iron cross, and a relic of the holy Cross. (17) S. John Chrysostome tells us that in Constantinople, at his time, there were a thousand religious virgins.(18)

And from him we learn, that a person was allowed to make a vow, binding herself in that state, *at the age of twelve*, at which, by the Roman law, *she could validly marry*.(19) This brings us to our point. The Trullan synod in the East fixed *ten* as the earliest age of profession ;(20) the council of Agde in Gaul named *eleven* ;(21) the Capitulars of Charlemagne,(22) and the Decretals *twelve* ;(23) the constitutions of St. Basil *sixteen* or *seventeen* ;(24) the African canons *twenty-five*.(25)

By this enumeration, it will be seen that in the earlier Church, and in the East, when greater piety prevailed, and where it is notorious that the usual age of marriage is much earlier than in the West, a very early age was named at which religious vows might be taken, bearing relation to the legal age of marriage. Both the canon and the

(15) *S. Greg. Naz. Or. de laudib. Basilii.*

(16) *Theodoret, Histor. Relig. c. xx.* (17) Vol. xv. p. 502.

(18) *Hom. lxxvii. in Mat.*

(19) *Hom. viii. in Ep. i. ad Tim.* (20) *Cap. lix.*

(21) *Conc. Agath. A. 506, Cap. ix.*

(22) *Capit. Car. Mag. l. i. c. 107.*

(23) *Decret. Greg. IX. l. i. tit. 31, c. 8.*

(24) *Reg. S. Basilii, c. xviii.*

(25) *Conc. Carthag. III. an. 397, c. 4.* Probably these two last are the dates of consecration, the last corresponding to the one in the Pontifical. We are indebted for most of the learning of this portion of our work to Pelliccia's valuable work, *De Christianæ Ecclesiæ Politia*, ed Ritter. tom. i. pp. 91, seqq.

civil law fixed the age of puberty at *twelve*,⁽²⁶⁾ and consequently, that was likewise considered the ordinary age at which, till the Council of Trent, religious profession was allowed. Where there were age and discretion enough for one choice, it was considered there were for the other. The fathers of the Council, seeing the change of manners, and the different state of society gradually introduced, do say, that I believe it to be false. If the informant was a married man at that time, it is impossible that it could have been part of his duty, to attend the Cardinal Vicar altered the period, and pronounced every profession invalid which was made before the entrance into the seventeenth year, an age nearer that at which marriage is frequently contracted in the south. And, in fact, at eighteen, a queen is considered sufficiently advanced in sense and wisdom, to undertake the government of a vast empire like this. It was not thought a dishonour, but a glory, to the Church in ancient days, that martyrdom crowned virginity at an early age. Who more honoured and cherished in the memory of saints than St. Agnes who, at *thirteen*, had not only vowed herself to chastity, but maintained her choice at the price of life? Let Mr. Hobart Seymour read St. Ambrose's panegyric of her in his first book, *De Virginibus*, and he will see it recorded to her praise: "To-day is the birthday of a virgin; let us cultivate purity. It is the birthday of a martyr; let us offer up sacrifices. It is the birthday of St. Agnes, let men wonder, and little ones not despair; let the married be amazed, let the unmarried imitate.....She is said to have suffered martyrdom at the age of thirteen." Or, if he prefer the charms of verse, let him turn over to Prudentius's hymn on St. Eulalia; and there learn, that God did not find the age of *twelve* too tender for the consecration of a virgin, by the sprinkling of her own blood. And the Christians of Merida, in the time of Dioclesian, instead of scoffing at the "youthful enthusiast," as modern Protestants would have called her, built a sumptuous church over her remains. But what relish can Mr. Seymour have for such delicate graces, who, quoting the example of St. Rose's early vow at five, adds a remark, which may have been suited to the taste of his audience, but is too vulgar and too rakish to be transferred to our

(26) *Cap. De iis, et cap. ult. de Desp. Impub. Princ. Instit. de Nupt. Lib. iv. ff. de Actu Nupt. c. Pub.*

pages? For his blasphemies against the saints, may God and they forgive him! But it is truly sickening to see an individual calling himself a clergyman, who cannot speak publicly on chastity except unchastely, nor on holiness without impiety; who seems to consider human nature, redeemed at so dear a price, and elevated by grace, as only the sink of vile passions, and incapable of knowing virtue except through its antagonistic vice; who forgets, or does not believe, that the Son of God would have no mother but a virgin, (one, too, who, while yet in the opening of youth, gave to the announcing angel intimation of an irrevocable, previous vow, which every pure mind will easily believe to have accompanied the first dawn of reason and earliest consciousness of grace;) and who, therefore, cannot understand that God may directly inspire a soul whom He “prevents in the blessings of sweetness,”* with a love of a virtue without even a knowledge of its sinful opposite,—may make a child cherish humility without ever having tasted pride;—meekness, without having yielded to anger;—temperance, without experience of excess. And so may a child of grace, far earlier than coarser natures conceive, shroud itself in a veil of inward modesty, shrink instinctively from the caress of most innocent affection, and, seeing intuitively that human love, in every shape, enthralles the heart, dedicate its own to an unseen, but clearly contemplated, object, its Saviour, and its God. It has not been uncommon to affiance a princess of that age to a future royal husband; it is not unusual to hear children, almost in the nursery, promise future love, and espousals, to companions of the same age, and speak of one another as already mutually pledged to union for life; and no one sees in all this, precocity of evil. But let a child, instead of its toys, kiss the crucifix, and in early years say, that it loves Him whom it represents, beyond all others, and will love Him through life to the exclusion of every other object, and will have Him for sole companion, only friend, and will not engage in any other bond of love but with Him, this is to be considered evidence of a revolting familiarity with hateful vice! Such is Mr. Seymour’s idea of those early grace-sown virtues, which spring spontaneously in a regenerated soul, nursed by the Catholic Church; such his judgment, no doubt ratified by his Bath audience

* Ps. xx. 4.

(thank God ! mothers were not there,) upon that mystical betrothal of herself to her Lord, which St. Rose of Lima made in almost infancy, but only to be ratified by her at a maturer age, when she might repeat it, and make it binding, though still doubtless, in spite of Mr. S.'s low opinion of virtue, with ignorance of sin.

But we will show later, by authentic returns, how practically different from what he would wish to make his readers believe, is the age at which religious, in this country, are received to profession.

We have dwelt at perhaps too great a length for our reader's patience, on the charge of imprisonment, or compulsory entrance into religion. It is in reality the essential objection advanced to this state. We trust, indeed, that we have said enough to confute it. But we are told of terrible instances to prove the contrary : and here begins the more disagreeable portion of our task.

We are told by Mr. Seymour, of a person who holds, or who held, office at the papal court. "It was a part of his duties to attend the Cardinal Vicar in his visitations of the nunneries ; he was, therefore, a most competent person to give information as to the inner life of a convent. He was a man amiable, domestic, religious ; he was a married man, and the father of a family ; and he and his wife imparted information of exceeding interest upon all this subject."*

What do you think, gentle reader, is the extent of this "information of exceeding interest?" It is that before the age of twenty-five, such is the conventual life, that the majority of the nuns in Rome died of madness ! Upon hearing this statement, two Catholic gentlemen sought to know of the lecturer, who is the authority for this strong assertion, but in vain ! And we may say once for all, that the whole of the anecdotes which Mr. Seymour has used are to be classed under two heads—first, those founded upon mere hearsay ; and secondly, those for which no authority is given but his own word.

Were any one to assert, that scenes of darkness and villany, of murder, of the violation of innocence, of the foulest and most hideous crimes were perpetrated in the houses of the English clergy ; and if he gave anecdotes of these deeds, upon the authority of persons having access

* 1st. Lec. p. 8.

to their houses, and if one came forward and said, "For God's sake let us know your authority for these statements, that we may institute inquiry into their truth;" were he to skulk away and say, "No, I cannot do so, for I should expose my informant to risk," what would you pronounce of such a man? Oh, we know what you would say—you would denounce him as a calumniator, and hold he had better never have said such things, than have uttered them, and then refuse to give those most interested, the means of testing their veracity.

After the lecture, a Catholic gentleman of high family, of unblemished character, and unquestioned integrity and honour, who has sisters and aunts in convents, felt that this description of the conventual life in Rome was such an outrage upon the truth—that it reflected so seriously upon the characters of those whom he had been accustomed to regard as beings of superior sanctity—that he went to him who had publicly made these assertions, and entreated him to give him his authority for them; but in vain! This statement, then, we solemnly believe to be a pure untruth; we mean, that we believe it to be so, as to the source whence it is stated to proceed; as to the facts, we unhesitatingly pronounce it to be so.

We might, were it necessary, procure the returns of the different convents in Rome, and the state of mortality in them. Why the very statistics,* to say nothing of humanity, were such statements true, would ensure an instant

* An admirable instance of Mr. S.'s art of trying to mystify his readers, and shuffling off his ground here occurs. Any one could at once see that "the statistics" here alluded to mean "the returns of different convents," mentioned in the preceding line. Mr. S. at once takes the words to allude to "the statistics" and mortality of Rome; and proceeds to give the following instructive lesson in the science:

"But since he speaks of statistics, he should recollect that there are other persons in the world who have the command of statistics as well as Cardinals themselves. *And what are the statistics?* In the city of London, by the public statistics, the number of deaths, as compared with the number of souls, is 1 in 45—in London, the greatest city of the world, the capital of the commercial world. *But in the city of Rome, that city of the ecclesiastical world, that city which has more nuns in it than any other city in the world—in the city of Rome the deaths are, by public statistics, 1 in 25, nearly double the number as compared with the population of London.* Two deaths in

remedy. But, can you believe any set of men—even though they may be Catholic priests, to be so inhuman, as to allow such a state of things to exist under their very inspection? Certainly there exists not a more humane and upright man—a man nobler in blood and in character, than Cardinal Patrizi, the Cardinal Vicar at Rome. Do you suppose he, or any one else whose duty and interest it would be to look after the convents, would allow it? Do,

Rome for one in London! Does not this look as if the statistics told rather the other way from the Cardinal's inference?"—p. 51.

Mr. Seymour would therefore have us believe, or considered his audience either stupid enough or fanatical enough to believe, that the difference between *one* death in 45 in London, and one in 25 in Rome, was caused by the deaths of nuns, under twenty-five years of age. Now in 1841, the last return accessible to us, there was in Rome a population of 158,868 inhabitants, and there were 1,580 nuns, that is not one in a hundred. We are therefore to believe that the mortality of 158,000 inhabitants is doubled by that in a 100th part. [The number of nuns is now 1698, in a population of 172,382.]

Or take the wise calculation as follows. If the mortality of Rome were the same as in London, there would be about 3,160 deaths a year in a population of 158,000, or *one* in 45. And this it would be but for its nuns, who cause it to double, and be *one* in 25, that is, 6,320. Therefore half this number represents the mortality in convents; namely, 3,160 per annum, in 1,581 nuns. So much for Mr. Seymour's "statistics." We have taken his proportion of deaths, without verifying them, which we consider a daring measure.

† It was "a daring measure" to take Mr. Seymour's data, without verifying them. We will do him the justice, to state that in Blackie's "Popular Encyclopedia," Glasgow, 1841, (art. *Longevity*) the mortality in Rome is stated as one in twenty-five. But that of London is given as one in forty.

But on the first of January, the very day after the publication of the Review, the *Morning Chronicle* published the annual statistics of Rome, for 1851 and 1852, extracted from the *Giornale di Roma* of Dec. 21. From these we learn, that the population of that city has encreased 3,456 in one year, being now 172,382. But this is not to us the most interesting fact, at present. We there find that the rate of mortality is not as one in twenty-five, but as one in thirty-six; being a difference of *eleven* in increase, on Mr. Seymour's proportion. Finding this notable inaccuracy, we applied to the "General Register" office for a statement of the mortality of London, and were courteously answered that in 1851 it was, not

you suppose that if we, considered it so destructive of human life, we or any man could see nun after nun pouring into convents when we were certain, that at the age of twenty-five she would be either a maniac, or have already pined and faded into the grave?

On this subject, the Cardinal, in his Lecture replied as follows:—

“Convents, however, if you believe the statement I have referred to, are not prisons, they are worse—they are lunatic asylums. I have, however, had the means of inquiring into the truth of some part of this anecdote—I have looked over the list of those, who by possibility could, in fulfilment of their duties, have had occasion to attend the Cardinal Vicar, in his visitations of nunneries, and I find amongst them none but ecclesiastics, although we are told that the informant was a married man. Now it is an easy thing for this lecturer to let us verify, whether such a statement was made. I am sorry to say it, but I must and do say, that I believe it to be false. If the informant was a married man at that time, it is impossible that it could have been part of his duty, to attend the Cardinal Vicar in his visitations to nunneries; and no person whose duty it was to perform such duties at that time, can have since been married.

“But, it has been hinted, that the individual who made these statements, would, if discovered, be thrown into prison, and kept in confinement, perhaps, for years. No such thing. I will myself undertake that he shall be without risk—nay, I will give bail and bond, that if he will come

one in forty-five, but one in forty-three. It is clear that thirty-six is not the half of forty-five, the proportion between the two mortalities given by Mr. H. Seymour.

If the rate of mortality appear high even thus in Rome, we will observe,—1. that a large body of celibate clergy necessarily adds much to the deaths, without a corresponding addition to the population by births; without diminishing the rate of longevity. 2. That every summer and autumn there flock to the campagna round Rome multitudes of labourers from other provinces, a number of whom are struck by fever, and die in the Roman hospitals, and thus swell the deaths, without appearing in the census, annually made in April. Mr. Whiteside remarks, what we can bear testimony to, that in the one hospital of Santo Spirito, the number of beds is increased during those seasons from 300 to 1200. (Italy, vol. iii. p. 208.)

forward and verify the statement, he shall not only not have a single hair of his head injured, but he shall be looked upon as a benefactor to his race, and that, too, in the country in which he lives. I repeat, however, that I must, and do, refuse to believe such an anecdote until it is verified; and I must deny the right of any one to make such accusations, without affording the accused the means whereby they may be tested."

We need hardly assure our readers, that this appeal was made in vain. Further inquiries confirm what was here stated, that, independent of all enquiry into the facts themselves, no such information could have been procured in the manner stated. But as to the facts, they would amount to this most marvellous statement, that out of 1,581 nuns in the convents in Rome in 1841, all were either under twenty-five years old, or else raving mad. To the falsehood of such an assertion, we pledge our veracity; and challenge enquiry, not difficult to make. As, however, England is what must interest Englishmen most, we will present here two tabular returns exhibiting the ages at which members have been professed, and an account of deaths that have occurred in English convents.

No. 1.—Professions and deaths during the last twenty years in religious communities established in this country for a longer period.

A.—A community of 42 members.

(1) None were professed under the age of 23.

(2) Five sisters have died; three above 80 years of age; one above 70; and one below 40.

B.—A community of 48 members.

(1) None were professed under the age of 22.

(2) Twenty-six sisters have died; three above 80; 10 above 70; four above 60; and two below 40.

C.—A community of 25 members.

(1) None professed under the age of 21.

(2) Nine sisters have died; two above 80; two above 70; one above 60; and none below 40.

D.—A community of 15 members.

(1) None professed under 21; and the average age has been 26.

(2) Six sisters have died; two above 80; three above 70; and one above 60; none below 40.

E.—A community of 48 members.

(1) None professed under 21.

(2) Twenty-eight sisters have died; one was 90; six above 70; five above 60; and six below 40.

F.—A community of 40 members.

(1) Two professed under 21.

(2) Fifteen sisters have died ; one was 89 ; four others above 80 ; four above 60 ; and two below 40.

G.—A community of 19 members.

(1) Two professed under the age of 21. Average age of profession has been 23.

(2) Eleven sisters have died ; two above 80 ; three above 70 ; two above 60 ; and one below 40.

No. 2.—Professions and deaths, during the periods stated, in religious communities more recently established.

H.—In England 11 years, and numbers 30 sisters.

(1) None professed under 21.

(2) Four have died ; three from the ages of 42 to 55 ; one below 40.

I.—In England seven years, and numbers 37 sisters.

(1) None professed under 21.

(2) Two sisters have died ; one of cholera at the age of 30 ; the other of typhus fever, at 23.

J.—In England five years, and numbers 21 sisters.

(1) One professed under 21.

(2) Two sisters had died of consumption under the age of forty.

From these statistics then, whose accuracy may be depended upon, for they have been obtained from the most authentic sources, it appears ;

First—That out of 325 professed nuns in England, belonging to ten different houses, *five* have been professed under the age of twenty-one ; that is, under two per cent. of the whole number.

Secondly—That out of a hundred and eight nuns deceased within the last twenty years—belonging to various orders, some engaged in active works of mercy among the poor, as H. and I. ; others in education, as B. and E. ; and others again given wholly to a life of prayer and contemplation, and keeping therefore strict *clausura*, as A. C. and D. ;—forty-nine, or very nearly one-half of the whole, have *exceeded* the span of life allotted by the Psalmist, three-score years and ten ; of these twenty-four were above eighty ; and of these again one was eighty-nine, and another ninety ; whilst seventeen, or about one-sixth of the whole, died under the age of forty.

Dr. J. B. F. Descuret, physician to the Carmelite Con-

vent in the Rue de l'Enfer, at Paris, has given us the following results of his statistical observations, in that austere community.

Of 302 nuns deceased, (no period given)

23 had exceeded 80 years of age.

59 " 70 "

69 " 60 "

The average of life he states to be there 57 years and four months.*

Returning to the charge of madness, we have two more precious evidences alleged in Mr. Seymour's first Lecture. The first is that of a young lady who is said to have been forced by her father to commence her novitiate in a nunnery. We are told that "Having completed that year, so long and so sad to her, she entreated to be relieved from proceeding further, and prayed to be exempted from taking the black veil, and becoming a nun for life."

We may observe here, again, as we stated just now, that she would have had the opportunity of speaking to those whose duty it was, and who would have been bound, to see that she was not involuntarily imprisoned. But the relator of the anecdote continues:—"Her father, however, who had, from her earliest childhood, assigned her this destiny of the cloister as her provision, would not be moved from his settled purpose, and she was obliged, as usual, to submit, and she took the vows, and assumed the black veil. But, as is usual on such occasions, she was to bid farewell to her family: and having sent for her father, apparently with that view," (we may observe that novices in Italy always go out of the convent three days before that time, for the purpose of seeing their friends, so that she might have had many opportunities for committing the tragic act related, without having to send for her father to the convent,) "and while in the very act of speaking to him, as uttering her sad and melancholy farewell, she drew a knife, stabbed herself to the heart, and fell dead at his feet!"†

We have another similar instance of suicide a few pages further on. It is said to have occurred in 1845, when the speaker was in Rome. He says—

["When I was at Rome, a few years since, the gates of one of

* *La Médecine des Passions. Liège, 1844. Third edition.*

† First Lecture p. 15.

the nunneries was opened for some purpose, and one of the nuns rushed frantic forth, escaped all her pursuers, plunged into the river, and there sought to bury her sins, her sorrows, and her shame, under the waters of the Tiber."—p. 20.

In another work by the same author, called "A Pilgrimage to Rome," we are told that this was, not merely a nun, but an abbess—so that she must have been one not subjected to the tyranny of another, but one who exerted tyranny and oppression over others—it was the superior over all in the place, who rushed out of the convent in a frantic state, and who "sought to bury her sins, her sorrows, and her shame, under the waters of the Tiber."

Here, then, are two cases of suicide, given us, as the result of the terribleness of the Conventual life, and as the mode adopted to escape from it. One, that of a person, not a professed nun, and who had, therefore, nothing to bind her; the other, of a person already professed, but the abbess, who had possession of the keys, and who had, therefore, no need of watching when the gates were opened "for some purpose;" for it must be remembered that the gates are not locked from without, but from within, and that without the abbess, who has the keys, even the Cardinal Vicar cannot gain admission!

Here are two occurrences, then, which must, if they ever took place, have caused considerable sensation. It is impossible for any one who knows anything of Rome, not to feel, that such events as these must have become extensively known. What authority, however, does the speaker give for the truth of them? We will give it in an extract from a letter sent to us by the gentleman who called upon him, containing an account of his interview with him on this subject. He says:—"With reference to all such stories he had no evidence to give, but hearsay; and in reference to that one about the nun throwing herself into the Tiber, he answered that it was the talk of Rome. I asked him what convent it was? and he said he did not know, but that it was the public talk at Rome in 1846." Now surely, before this statement was a second time put forth, it must have been easy to ascertain in what convent it was that this unhappy nun was Abbess. And in the work already mentioned, too, it is said that the convent was not far from Mr. S.'s residence; and as there is not a convent in every street, it would not have been difficult, one would have supposed, to find its locality and its name. Again, there is this diffi-

culty. In the first statement it is said, that hundreds saw her, and could not rescue her. It must, therefore, have been a very public place where she rushed into the Tiber. She must have come too, in her nun's, or her abbess's dress, and if there were hundreds who saw her, and could not rescue her, there must be hundreds acquainted with these facts. We call upon you then, fair and honest readers, until some evidence be produced that such an event occurred, to disbelieve the statement, and suspend your judgments upon that system, the enormity of which it is put forth to illustrate. Do, for the sake of justice and charity, insist upon the means of proving, or disproving it, being given to us. It is impossible that a nun, much less then an abbess, should have thrown herself into the Tiber, and have been drowned without its being noticed by the public papers. But if there was no proof of it, if it was founded on mere hearsay—why was not the anecdote given as—"It is said," or "I have heard?"—why was it given as a fact—as a thing notorious—known to all, and only an instance and a proof, of the systematic villany carried on within the walls of the convents, where we are told "every crime of earth, and every vice of hell may be rife!"

But we cannot allow this atrocious tale to be considered merely as a statement waiting, or wanting, proof. Mr. Seymour, in his first publication of the tale, in his "Pilgrimage to Rome," spoke, if we mistake not, of its being "current in Rome;" and in his second Lecture he tells us that it was "the subject of conversation in society at Rome" (p. 46). Now this is a fact easily ascertained. We have enquired from persons living there at the time—Englishmen—likely to know what was current in Rome, and a subject of conversation there, especially in the class of "influential" people; and, unanimously, we have been answered, that no such tale was current, and that no such occurrence was spoken of. Nay, more, one gentleman of unimpeachable veracity writes to us as follows: "With reference to the story of the abbess throwing herself into the Tiber, which Hobart Seymour says was 'current in Rome,' I made every inquiry there myself, as soon as his 'Pilgrimage' reached me (in the early Spring of 1849), and *I could hear nothing of it whatever*. If you should think the evidence of one who made enquiries *on the spot* worth mentioning, I need hardly say, is quite at your disposal."

But further, Mr. Seymour even pretends to no more authorisation, than for the fact of this poor abbess throwing herself into the river. What right has he to say, in justice or in charity, that she “there sought to bury her sins, her sorrows, and her shame under the waters of the Tiber?” Who authorized him to assume the privilege, claimed as a Divine right by One alone, of searching the reins and heart? What knows this man of that fellow-creature’s “sin and shame,” supposing her to have had an existence out of his head? Has not many a lady, innocent and blameless, in a paroxysm of fever, thrown herself from a window? and is it, we will not say Christian, but manly, without knowledge, or enquiry, or decent ground for surmise, to add disgrace to misfortune, and proclaim, as if a known fact, what the writer cannot possibly have learnt. Mr. Seymour strongly objects against the exception taken above, to the contradiction between the two versions of his story, in one of which the religious suicide figured as an abbess, and in the other as a simple nun. He writes as follows :

“But the Cardinal says that he discovers a discrepancy between the statements of the *Pilgrimage to Rome* and of the lecture ; in the first, it is said to be an abbess, in the second a nun. Now, it is the same sort of contradiction as if in writing from London, I said an archdeacon of the Church of England had thrown himself into the Thames ; and afterwards I had said, that it was a clergyman of the Church of England. And this is the amount of contradiction discovered by the Cardinal ; for though certainly every nun is not an abbess, yet we know that every abbess must be a nun.”—p. 46.

Not quite so. Let us propose another comparison ; let us suppose that a priest had written to Rome, in proof of the moral state of Oxford, that during his residence there, one day “the head of a house” had rushed out from his college in a state of inebriety, and in the presence of hundreds, who tried in vain to stop him, had plunged into the Isis, “there to bury his sin and shame ;” and for his authority, had said that an influential person in the church had come into his room much excited, immediately after, and told him, and that it was the “current talk” of Oxford. And then suppose that, in a later publication, he spoke of the self-murderer as merely “a student of one of the colleges,” would not this have been contradiction enough, and very different from the discrepancy in accounts, which first spoke of an archdeacon and then of a clergyman ?

Mr. Seymour's second lecture abounds with these paltry subterfuges, which it would wear out the time and patience of our readers to notice. But again, the Cardinal having spoken of the improbability of "the newspapers" not having got hold of such an occurrence, Mr. S. at once jumps at this, and begins one of his indirect attacks, assaulting the *Roman* papers, and the Roman government, because it would not allow the English papers to be read in Rome. This is all throwing dust into his readers' eyes. He knew perfectly well that a person speaking in England of "the newspapers" does not mean the Roman ones, and that the fact of insertion in the English papers does not depend upon their being read in Mr. Monaldini's reading-room. The *Times* has always had a tolerably vigilant correspondent in Italy, and not a very scrupulous one. The *Chronicle*, however negatively fair towards us in England, keeps an "own correspondent" too, bitter enough, and credulous enough, when the disparagement of Rome is in question; and we need say nothing of the *Herald*, or other inferior organs. This "natio Ardellionum" are too ready to gather up "the subjects of conversation in society there," and send them to feed the religious appetite of England. And we should reckon it an impossibility, that such dainty fare as an abbess, dressed in her own habit, and *passée à l'eau* of the Tiber, should have escaped these caterers.

At the close of the lecture, four other instances are given of nuns being disposed of by being sent abroad; and here again we have endeavoured to obtain the means of verifying the facts, but have failed. It is also intimated that gross moral delinquency had taken place, which makes the calumny worse. If true, the police and magistrates should have interfered; but such statements should not be put forth as everyday occurrences in religious establishments, and when proof is asked, the parties seeking it be denied all evidence of the facts.

This brings us to another, and a very important matter. One of the great objections urged to the conventual system is, that English nuns have been sent abroad to join affiliated convents on the continent. We are told of a case in which it is said that the nun, whilst in England, was felt to be near her friends, and that there was a possibility of her escape, but that she was removed, and her friends knew not what had become of her, until she was discovered in a foreign convent. But it is not said whether

she was of age, and had a right to act as she thought proper; it is not said whether she removed abroad by her own choice, nor whether, when she was discovered in a foreign convent, she had stated that she was not placed there by her own consent. Surely these things should be told us; as all must be aware, that if a person was of age, she had a perfect right to control her own actions, and to spend her fortune as she might deem most proper.*

Religious orders, however, are of two classes. There are houses which are independent, and there are others which are affiliated to a mother house either here or abroad. In England, for instance, there are only two or three affiliated houses, and they are in connexion with nunneries in France. One of these communities was established here for the purpose of taking care of orphans. The good nuns who founded it came over here, and sunk £4,000 or £5,000 of their money for that holy object. Others have come for the purpose of conducting education. They were sent here from the parent houses abroad, to which they remain connected as affiliated convents. But in these orders, it is perfectly well known to any lady who may enter the house, that she is not to be confined to that house, but may have to change her domicile, and go as a missionary to other places, if it be found desirable that she should do so. It is considered no hardship that ladies should go abroad with their husbands who may choose to become missionaries; and who shall say that it is a grievance for Catholic nuns to be sent to the Cape of Good Hope, or Calcutta, when they entered the religious houses for the very purpose of going where their superior might find it desirable to send them? Is it, then, a grievance that English nuns are abroad? No; it is a matter of choice. And as to the other class of convents, where they are independent, there is no power to remove a nun out of the house to which she belongs, and never, therefore, do any go abroad, unless their health should perhaps require a change of climate.

There is, however, another grievance, we are told. It is, that daughters of clergymen in the Church of England

* Mr. Seymour's exaggerated and false statements, and deductions on this pretended grievance of deportation in his second Lecture, are truly beneath notice.

have been induced to enter Catholic convents. But we are not told how many have entered convents, because they have been driven from their father's house. Let us set grievance against grievance. We could give the names of many who have driven their children from their homes, not because they had become Catholics, but merely because they were suspected of entertaining Catholic views. There is an instance with which we are acquainted, in which the father, whilst his daughter was yet in the age of pupilage, and before she had become a Catholic, in the depth of the night, pushed her from his house, and closed his door upon her. Again, we could give a case in which the three daughters of a gentleman were sent away from their home, with no more clothes than those they wore—sent away in cold and bitter weather, as the day was closing; and they had to walk six or seven miles before they found shelter. They were not then become Catholics; but Catholics took them in, and afforded them shelter. They sent to their father for their clothes, but he refused to give them. They were aged from fourteen to twenty, and had never left their parental roof. For a time they were entirely dependent on the charity of strangers. One of them, however, obtained a situation as a governess, and the others have entered a convent. Oh, there is nothing unnatural in a Protestant father driving his children into the streets of London; but let that child seek refuge in a Catholic convent, and the act is made a subject for rabid declamation, and becomes a great iniquity in exciting harangues. The clergyman of the parish was waited on, and entreated to intercede with the parents, but he refused, and defended their conduct.

We are ready to give the names of these persons, but we must have a proper assurance, that they are not required for the satisfaction of mere curiosity. When, therefore, any lady or gentleman whose station and character are such as to leave no doubt of the propriety of entrusting to them the delicate duty of enquiring into the private affairs of others, we shall have no hesitation in putting them in possession of such evidence as will verify what we say.

And let us here add a reference to still more serious cases. We could cite instances of Protestant parents, upon their children becoming Catholic, compelling them

to enter convents, at least as boarders, by giving them an allowance, only on the condition of living there. Still worse, we have ourselves been applied to, by such parents, to assist in obliging a daughter to become a nun, in spite of her repugnance, or at least in absence of all inclination. We replied, that they had totally mistaken the object of such institutions, which were not prisons, but the abode of voluntary, and happy recluses. In his lecture, the cardinal gave the following illustration :—

“I have said that such instances are recent. No earlier than yesterday I heard of the case of an individual, not far from here, who has driven his daughter from her home because she had become a Catholic. She, too, was received into a conventual house, and received food and shelter, where, God knows, the nuns are poor enough. It is only a few days ago since this event happened in a neighbouring county.”

And here, by way of showing the extreme inaccuracy and looseness of statement which characterises Mr. Seymour's lectures, we will give an extract from the first. It follows the anecdote about the nun plunging into the Tiber. We deny that statement, not vehemently, but coolly, and until it is proved, according to the old English maxim, we maintain that we have a right to deny it. The lecturer, however, proceeds to say :—

“I know, and we all know, how vehemently they deny charges of this kind ; and we are all acquainted with the amount of vehement indignation with which they receive our charges against their priestly inquisitors.”—p. 20.

He then proceeds to describe the Grand inquisitor as follows :—

“I well remember the Grand Inquisitor at Rome. He was a tall man with small and neat features ; a hectic colour suffused his pale face ; he had a small sparkling eye, and that nervous movement of every feature which denotes a man of extreme irascibility of temper. He was a man like Saul, head and shoulders above his fellows, and, dressed as he was in the peculiar robes of the Dominican order, was always a striking figure in the Papal processions.”

What a striking picture ! It wants but truth ! The Grand Inquisitor has no place in the Papal processions,

and, therefore, is not always there ! It is a dream, or it is a fiction !*

And then, following it, is the tale which we should have thought any one would have been ashamed to reproduce again at this time—the tale of the Inquisition having been thrown open to the people of Rome, and of the evidences of torture found therein ! Surely any one who pretended to tell that to his hearers as truth, ought also to have told them, that the whole scene was got up by the revolutionists to excite the feelings and inflame the minds of the populace. He ought to have told them that those who first went in, when the gates of the Inquisition were thrown open, saw none of those things ; he ought to have told them that after that the place was sedulously closed for several weeks ; that then it was again thrown open ; and that then it was, that the instruments of torture were seen, and the charred bones, and the remains of human bodies. But it has since been proved by an eminent antiquary, that the spot was formerly a cemetery for the interment of strangers, and that the bodies discovered were, without doubt, those of persons buried there. Nobody in Rome

* Mr. Seymour, in answer to this, pretends that he *did* see the Grand Inquisitor, in his Dominican habit in papal processions, as English, German, and French gentlemen after receiving palms from the Pope, join in such processions “unofficially,” and so does “the Grand Inquisitor, whom Mr. S. saw.” But our denial is total. Omitting the trifling fact that there is no Dominican holding such an office as Grand Inquisitor, which does not exist, we say, 1st. that Mr. Seymour’s description of the very tall Dominican, with sparkling eye, &c., is that of F. Buttaoni, Master of the Sacred Palace, who has an *official* place in all papal processions, and is, or was, generally in them. 2nd. That the first Commissary of the Holy Office, who is the highest Dominican functionary in that dreaded tribunal, never officially or otherwise attends such functions. 3rd. That Mr. S. speaks of some one who *always* was there, which could not apply to any Dominican, but him whose portrait he so well remembers. Such points may appear trifling : but like what we noticed above, about “the abbess or the nun,” they serve to show what any one will at once see, a habit of saying one thing obvious in meaning, and then when this is proved false, a shuffling into another *possible* meaning, not contemplated in the first statement. This is characteristic of this gentleman’s writings. It is impossible to follow him, into the countless instances of it, in these lectures.

believes that tale now; and it is a cruel imposition to repeat it as true.

But this subject has already been treated in the 28th volume of the Dublin Review, (p. 505) to which we therefore refer our readers. Mr. Seymour thinks it impossible that the Inquisitors should have built their palace over a graveyard. They did not build it anywhere; Pius V. bought it already built, adjoining the church called "*S. Salvatoris de Ossibus*."

All this is intended, however, only to introduce what we must call the vulgar part of the attack on nunneries. For he continues thus:

"There were these ghastly witnesses of the sacerdotal villanies of Rome. I mean not to say" [that is, I *do* mean to say] "that we shall find similar evidence in the cells of all their nunneries; but so long as they are characterized with mystery, secrecy and concealment, so long we feel there is something that requires mystery, something that requires secrecy, something that requires concealment."—p. 21.

It has been always in our memory, a sort of English proverbial boast, that "every Englishman's house is his castle:" and even Mr. Seymour loudly eulogizes the security from domiciliary visits which residence in this country affords. But it seems, this privilege and this security do not, or ought not to belong to those, whom we should have imagined feelings, not of gallantry, but of manliness would have rendered most sure of their possession. Ladies, frequently of the highest rank, and always of the most irreproachable character, whose fathers, brothers, and relatives are often in the Senate, in the Army, among the best of the land, living together in their own houses, associating poorer, but unimpeachable sisters to their community, at peace with all around them, blameless, charitable, and unoffending, without any protection but their own worth, any guardianship but the equal laws of their country, are singled out, as requiring to be made exceptions to that liberty of living as one chooses, so long as he does not infringe the laws, of which Mr. Seymour makes a special boast. (p. 8. 2nd Lect.) We do not know what exactly he means by "sacerdotal villany;" but one form of it we should not hesitate to find, in any person deeming and calling himself a clergyman, who yet, without evidence, or shadow of reason, should cast the foulest

imputations on those whose sex, rank, education, character and life entitle them to the respect and honour, or at any rate to the forbearance, of gentlemen and Christians, as much as his own wife, or daughters, or sisters. Nay, if the domestic conversation of some of that class be of such topics as they love to luxuriate in, on protestant platforms, we think an inquisition into the moral training of a parson's family may become a fitter subject of legal consideration, than Mr. Seymour's proposal for a search in the cells of convents. He then goes on,

"If they wish to escape our suspicions, or to refute our charges let them fling open their gates, let the light of day in on their inner life, and let their nunneries be made subject to official and public visitation."

"But, I ask, is there no remedy for these things? Is it not the duty of the Legislature to provide a remedy for these things? And are we not justified in appealing to the Sovereign of this land, herself a woman, to shield us from institutions like these? My own full and deep conviction is, that the only effectual remedy is the strong remedy of absolutely prohibiting altogether the existence of such establishments among us."—p. 52.

And again :—

"I have to thank the meeting for the kindness and the patience with which they have heard me, and I have to apologise for having detained them so very long. I will only add that, if this movement, in reference to the conventual system, leads to a more general movement throughout the country, or if I have succeeded in awakening in any breast here present a sympathy for those poor and imprisoned females of our nunneries, I have accomplished all I contemplated on the present occasion."—p. 57.

We have spoken of this part of the subject, as the more *vulgar* part. Every body who happens to be so unfortunate as to incur the suspicions of Mr. H. Seymour and his friends, is bound to "fling open his gates" to them, or petition for the favour and honour of being made "subject to an official and *public* visitation." Once a year, or oftener, if the public desire it, the gardens and houses of these ladies, including their cells, or private rooms, of course, cellar and kitchen, chapel and refectory must be made a public promenade, like Greenwich hospital and park; and the peeping and peering ladies of towns, who have petitioned parliament on the subject, and would give anything to see how nuns live, and the evangelical

clergyman's family, who are dying to have a good stare at those mysterious creatures with "such frippery as crucifixes and rosaries dangling at their girdles," * would thus have an opportunity of satisfying their vulgar curiosity.

But we believe our readers will be surprised when, after they have read these passages, they are informed of what follows. The gentleman to whom we have alluded, as having called on Mr. Seymour, with honest indignation asked him, whether he intended his accusations to apply to religious establishments in England, in which he had relatives most dear to him; and what, think you reader, was his reply? We will give the words of that gentleman's letter. "My object in calling on him was for the purpose of ascertaining from himself his authority for certain statements made by him in his lecture on nunneries; and also to hear from him, if he intended to insinuate anything disrespectful to such establishments in England. As to the latter, he declared most positively, that he knew nothing to the discredit of any nun, or nuns in England. * * * When I mentioned anything respecting my experience of convents in this country, and alluded to the insults I considered he had offered to those nearest and dearest to me, he met me by stating that he did not wish to insinuate anything against nuns in England, but only against the system." Surely this can hardly be called honest. Were they the Roman convents, which the Queen was to be petitioned about, and the legislature to interfere with? Were they Spanish convents which must fling open their gates "*to us*," if they wish to escape *our* suspicion? Is not all this mere cowardice and shuffling, a mean fear of admitting face to face, to an upright and honourable man, what was meant to be understood by the audience of the Assembly Rooms? Who does not know that those lectures were only a part of the machinery set at work, to inflame the public mind against convents in England; so much so that, were any one now to ask, why lofty walls and barred gates in convents, we might well justify our former answer, and illustrate it from present circumstances. For if again religious fanaticism is to rule, and the inventions of religious hatred are to be proclaimed as truth, the time may be near, when nuns may be again glad to have bolts to their doors, and bars to their windows. For, with such

inflammatory harangues as we have heard against these noble-hearted women—but that our people have bravely resisted the effort made to excite them—we might see, as was seen in America, mobs surrounding and destroying, the houses which the nuns had erected as a refuge for the poor !

Again, just to mention what some will consider a trifling matter, but which is adduced to show the hardship of a conventual life, we are told that when a young lady enters a convent and takes the veil, she is obliged to give up her Christian name and surname, and is never again known by her family or parental name ; so that she is so cut off from the world in this respect, that “ if a communication could possibly reach the outer world, from the world within, if it were possible that one of these sisters escaped from the convent, she could not, in all probability, inform any family in the land, of the destiny, however sad or necessary to be known, of any one of her sister nuns, owing to the fact of her not knowing the family name of any member of the sisterhood.” This is too absurd, really, for confutation, but it is not true. In every convent, certainly in this country, every nun knows the family name of every one in the community ; in many the family name is joined to the religious ; in some, as in the *Sacré Cœur*, no change of name takes place. The statement is therefore a fiction simply.

We must pass over a great deal, because we must test some statements, in order to obtain a standard of the veracity of the rest. Let us take one which occurs near the end of the lecture, and which shows that it was the convents of England, and not those on the Continent, which the speaker meant. He says—

“ My own full and deep conviction is, that the only effectual remedy is the strong remedy of absolutely prohibiting altogether the existence of such establishments among us. And although some persons will, perhaps, suggest that this is inconsistent with the liberties of the Roman Catholics, or of the Church of Rome, I would remind them that Milan is in a country where the whole population is Roman Catholic, where the government is Roman Catholic, where the Established Church is Roman Catholic ; and yet in Milan they have a law absolutely forbidding the existence of nunneries. Some years since they suppressed every nunnery within their frontier ; and last autumn I visited the last lingering relics of the last of them. In what had been once a most magnificent esta-

blishment, there were now only two old nuns ; they were regarded as too old to be removed, and they are allowed to remain and die there, but are absolutely prohibited from receiving any new or younger sister : and, perhaps, at the time I am speaking, those two old women are gone. With this exception, there is not a nun, or a nunnery, permitted within the walls of Milan."

Now here is a very definite statement, the result of personal examination, and clearly intended to rest upon the authority of the author himself. You are intended to understand, that the present government of Milan, absolutely forbids the existence of nunneries, that there are but two old nuns in the place, who are prohibited from receiving any new or younger sister, and that besides these there is not a nun or a nunnery within the walls of Milan ! You would suppose, too, that this system of suppression was a system approved of by the church of Milan, because you are not given to understand that it was some tyranny of the government which deprived nuns of the convents, but that the church must have assisted in the prohibition ! You are told that " Milan is in a country where the whole population is Roman Catholic, where the government is Roman Catholic, where the Established Church is Roman Catholic, and yet in Milan they have a law absolutely forbidding the existence of nunneries."

We will now give a list of the convents in Milan, and the names of the streets in which each is situated, and the order to which each belongs.

I. CLOISTERED NUNNERIES IN MILAN.

1. *Visitation*. There is a convent of the order of the Visitation. It is situated Al ponte di Porta Romana, at the bridge of the Roman gate. There is a school for young ladies of rank attached to it ; it has existed for two hundred years ; it was exempted from the suppression by Napoleon, in 1810, and is flourishing now.

2. *Augustinians*. Al corso di Porta Tosa. They have a school for young ladies.

3. *Ursulines*. Contrada della Vetera de' Cittadini, Borgo di Porta Ticinese—Boarding school and poor school.

4. *Ursulines*. Piazza di Sant' Ambrogio—Boarding school and poor school.

II.—NOT CLOISTERED CONVENTS.

1. *Le Signore della Guastalla*. Contrada di S. Barnaba Porta Tosa—Boarding school for young ladies.

2. *Figlie di Carità*, founded by the Marchioness Canossa. Four houses:—

1. Noviceship at S. Michele della Chiusa, Porta Ticinese.

2. Casa Fagnani, contrada di S. Maria Fulcorina, Porta Vercellina.

3. Contrada della Signora, Porta Tosa.

4. A. S. Simpliciano, borgo di Porta Comoriana.*

Now these four houses have poor schools, an establishment for the deaf and dumb, a normal school to educate school mistresses from country villages, and other institutions for works of charity attached to them.

3. *Sisters of Charity*, founded by La Capitaneo, in Lovere. Three houses:—

1. A magnificent hospital for women, near Porta Nuova.

2. The female part of the great city hospital.

3. A house for penitents in the Ospizio dell' Addolorata, presso S. Barnaba, Porta Tosa.

Therefore, in Milan, you have three cloistered orders, and three not cloistered orders; you have four houses of the first description, and eight of the second. In other words, you have twelve convents in Milan, flourishing up to the 1st of April, (at which time our news of them is dated,) and not suppressed!

But, as it is said that the nunneries are not only suppressed in Milan, but within their frontier, we will mention that in the diocese of Milan there are, besides those we have named as being within the city, convents at the S. Monte sopra Varese, Augustinians cloistered, at Monza, Treviglio, Legnano, Sisters of Charity; at Cernusco, an infant institution for the education of the middle class of persons.*

Thus making altogether seventeen religious houses in the town and diocese, in which it has been said there is not one!

* Mr. S., in his reply, says: "Of the province, however, I spoke nothing, because, in speaking of the city of Bath, we do not include the county of Somerset." (p. 49.) Is there no difference, then, between a county-town and the capital of a kingdom? Does not this usually give law to its "province?" But what, then, did Mr. S. mean by "the frontier," which he includes in the suppression? Mr. S.'s further replies and shifting of ground are too evidently in contradiction with his first statements to need comment.

Now what is this story about the two poor old nuns? It is true, as you all know, that convents were suppressed in 1810 by Napoleon. But is it fair to tell us that they are suppressed now, in a country where the people are Catholic, the government Catholic, and the Church Catholic? Napoleon made the suppression of all the convents in Milan excepting two, one of which has since ceased to exist, while sixteen others have risen up since 1820 in that liberal city. Now about these two old nuns. Napoleon, when he suppressed the convents, gave the great convent of S. Maria Maggiore, in the Corso di Porta Vercellina, to such nuns as wished to retire and die off in peace. There may be two of those nuns still living; and the lecturer says he visited them, and that they are in what "had been once a magnificent establishment." But as to the fact of his visit to these nuns, there is this difficulty; it is said the author visited them in the autumn of 1851, whereas, in 1848, that convent was converted into a barracks, and has since continued so. The two old nuns, however, might perhaps have been removed to some other establishment; but that there are only two nuns, and no nunneries in Milan, we do deny, and we have given the reader an opportunity of ascertaining the truth.

We come to another part of the subject which deserves a passing notice. It is that, where the speaker attempts, by entering into calculations, to show that the keeping up of convents is a pecuniary interest to the clergy, by the wealth thereby said to be created.

Having ourselves had some experience in convents and their affairs, and having, by the blessing of God, contributed to establishing several, we can safely state our solemn conviction, that they are generally very poor. We have never seen this great wealth. Indeed, so poor are they, that we have to make appeals yearly for their support, and that many of the inmates of them have to labour with their hands, as much as any poor needle-woman in London, to maintain themselves, and supply relief to the poor!

We will show, however, how erroneous these calculations, and how loose the lecturer's statements are.

It is said the amount of dowry each lady brings into the convent varies in different nunneries: "in some nunneries it is as low as £300, in others as high as £1000;" and that, taking it at the lowest sum, this would give a large

capital to the Church, "inasmuch as the interest of the dowry is sufficient for the ordinary support and maintenance of the nun; the original principal or capital remains intact. And the consequence is, that there is an enormous capital always accumulating for the Church of Rome, which is placed at the disposal of the Rota, or the Propaganda of the Church of Rome."*

Again, as a test of the accuracy of the statements, we will take the following:—"When I was in Tuscany, a few years since, I made enquiries on the subject, and was informed that there were from five to six thousand nuns in that vicinity." Now, we cannot tell what the vicinity of Tuscany means, because Tuscany is not a city, but a country; and when we talk of a vicinity, we mean the neighbourhood of some town. We will suppose Florence and its vicinity are here meant; but we will take it as being the whole of Tuscany. The author proceeds then to say:—"Now if we take the lowest number, 5000, and take also the lowest amount of dowry, £300, it will give at once, as a result, no less than a million and a half of sterling capital."—(p. 34.)

On what information, we should like to know, does the author found this calculation? But we will first test the accuracy of his figures by another statement. He goes on to say:—"When I was in Rome, they informed me that there were two thousand nuns in that city—and its vicinity; and if we take these at the lowest sum—namely, £300 each—it will give you £600,000 as their accumulated capital."

Now, in Rome, there are published official returns of the number of nuns, and we find, instead of 2000, as stated, the number to be 1500, or five hundred short; and that, when £300 are attached to each, would make a considerable difference in the calculation.

If, then, this hearsay at Rome turns out to be so erroneous also, may we not conclude that the hearsay in Tuscany was erroneous also?

And in fact so it is. The following extract of a letter

* First Lecture, p. 34. The Rota is the first civil tribunal of Rome; the Propaganda is the department of foreign missions. Neither has anything to do with convents, or their money. Nor does "the Church of Rome" get sixpence from them, nor any other church.

dated June 4, from an English gentleman of high character, for more than thirty years a resident in Florence, will prove this.

“The Rev. Mr. Hobart Seymour was singularly unfortunate in the information he received when in Tuscany a few years ago relative to the inmates of nunneries in Florence and its vicinity. If he had looked into a Tuscan Almanac, or had enquired for the statistical returns published every year by order of the Government, he would have learnt the precise number of the conventual establishments existing in the Grand Duchy, as well as of the professed and lay friars and nuns which they contain. Here is a verbatim copy of the authentic return of October 31, 1851.

In Firenze Monasteri di Femine No. 13, con entro Individui	436
Conservatorii (Oblate, educande, senza voti) ...	333
In Toscana Monasteri di Femine No. 70, Individui ...	2171
Id. Conservatorii come sopra No. 48. id. ...	1311
La dote che portano le monache è di Scudi 300, a Scudi 500	
Le servigiali non ne portano che Scudi 25.	

Of the above inmates in nunneries, two-thirds may be considered as professed nuns, one-third as lay-sisters.”

We give a translation of the part of the above statement which relates to *convents*.

“In Florence, Convents of women, No. 13, with Inmates, 436.

In Tuscany, “ “ “ 70, “ 2171.

The dowry brought by the nuns is from 300 to 500 dollars. The lay sisters bring only 25 dollars.”

We must observe, that the first number, that of convents in Florence, is included in the second, that of convents in Tuscany. For we have now before us a full and detailed table of every convent in Tuscany, the capital included, and the total number is exactly 2171. Only want of room prevents us publishing it.

Further, we must remark, that 300 and 500 Tuscan dollars, or Francesconi, are equivalent respectively to about £63 and £107.

Hence we have to make the following moderate reductions in the data of Mr. Hobart Seymour's calculation of Tuscan monastic wealth. Instead of 5000, or 6000 nuns, we must substitute 2171; not half his lowest number. Instead of his *lowest* amount of dowry, £300, we must take as many dollars, or one-fourth of that sum. So much for the accuracy of his calculations.

Again we must further reduce. Of the 2171 nuns, one-

third are lay sisters who bring no dowry: for their £5 or 25 dollars are not funded, but serve for their first expenses, habit, etc. There are therefore only 1448 nuns instead of 5000 paying dowry. Taking 400 dollars as the medium dowry, we find Mr. Seymour's "sterling capital" of a million and a half, possessed by Tuscan convents, dwindle down to £121,356, or about a twelfth.

Similar exaggerations will be found in all the other data. We have not made any minute enquiry: but we unhesitatingly say, that wherever we have asked, the result has been the same. In Belgium the dowry is not generally above £60: and there, and in France, and in England many are received without any, or with a very diminished portion. And this is one reason why convents do not become rich. If the money received were apportioned equally among the inmates, it would be found, for each individual, far below the prescribed dowry. Then again Mr. Seymour quite overlooks the constant outgoings, for repairs, rebuilding, and often beginning from the foundation, of convents, churches, schools, and other requisites. He will certainly never find a community becoming rich, through accumulation of capital. A new foundation, or a new building, or the poor, will soon swallow up any amount of conventual savings. As to his assertion that pecuniary advantages thus "accrue to the Church of Rome," we can only say it is a simple untruth. The property of a convent is administered by the community itself.

To crown this question, and prove by "evidence," that in Tuscany, Perugia, and Chiaveri, (Piedmont) the dowry is £300, Mr. Seymour goes to the court of Exchequer, where it was declared that a young lady in *Ireland* had to pay £600!* Now nothing had been said about the portion in Great Britain, where marriage portions and fortunes generally are larger, and where expenses are much heavier.

Before leaving Tuscany, we must touch on a subject, from which we naturally shrink. In his first Lecture Mr. Seymour said, that out of a multitude of illustrations he selected one, "because it occurred *within the lifetime of many in this assembly*:" namely, "the revelations respecting the nunneries in Tuscany." (p. 21.) He then

* 2nd Lect. p. 31.

went into further details. The natural impression was, that he alluded to something recent, proving great corruption in those establishments, almost at present. In fact who could have suspected from the expression we have marked, that he referred to an enquiry commenced seventy-seven years ago, and closed a few years later? Were there *two* people, we wonder, in the Bath Assembly Rooms that day, who were living at that time? Is it less than an untruth then to speak of that event, as appropriately chosen, "because it occurred during the lifetime of *many* in that assembly?"

But to proceed: at that time, before the French Revolution, several convents, exempt from episcopal jurisdiction, were represented as being in a state of frightful immorality. All the accounts that have been published are on one side, and there was every encouragement given to the accusation. Though commenced before his time, it was chiefly under the Jansenist and infidel bishop Scipio Ricci and the clergy of Pistoja, and under the reforming Grand Duke who was suppressing religious houses, that the investigation was carried on. There was every temptation, and every encouragement, for any amount of exaggeration. The circumstances were the same as in the time of Philip le Bel, and the Templars, or Henry VIII. and his suppressions.* Posterity does not believe the revelations of either period, especially the first.

In a late number of this Review, the subject had been treated, and reference was made to it, in the Cardinal's reply to Mr S.† It was said that two of the principal accusers were evidently mad. It was acknowledged by H. E. that disorders had occurred, and even allowing for all exaggeration, of a very heinous character. But further, it was argued, that the Holy See at once gave all necessary powers for reformation and correction, and authorized even the suppression of some convents. It might have been added, that since the commencement of the late Grand Duke's

* Not long ago an investigation took place into some English military schools: and frightful revelations were made. Many boys were expelled: but parents have continued to maintain the innocence of many, who were terrified, or impelled by the contagion of example, to accuse themselves grossly but unjustly. We have seen other instances of this case.

† Vol. xxxii. p. 65.

reign, in 1790, not a complaint, nor a call for reformation, has been made: but the friend, whose letter from Florence we have already quoted, observes, "things are now very different in Tuscany; the nunneries are most exemplary in their morals and disciplinary conduct."

It appears, therefore, that if crime should unfortunately at any time invade what is most holy, (and even the Apostles had to deplore such cases,) the Church has both will and power to cut out the gangrene, and restore the body to health. Now what is the answer which Mr. Seymour makes to this straightforward, and simple reply? Truly none: but the opportunity was too good to be lost, of reading to an assembly of gentlemen, many of them clergymen, the filthiest extracts from the evidence, real or imagined, of those wretched women. What necessity for this? it may well be asked. Nobody denied that such testimony had been given, and the hearing it could not prove that it was all true. And surely any of the gentlemen present could have been referred to the venomous pages of De Potter, and been allowed to suck himself full of the virus, in solitary unblushingness. But no; the zest would have been taken out of the evening's treat: the lecture would have wanted its anticipated relish. So soon as it was known, that ladies were to be excluded, there could be no doubt as to the indelicacy and loathsomeness of the materials, which this so-called minister of "religion undefiled" had collected for the edification of his audience. We own that we have not read the passages referred to in De Potter, nor even have we read the extracts in Mr. Seymour's Lecture; and we care not to avow it. We love not to wallow in mire and filth; we have been early trained to a contrary course. And what good to mind or heart can it be, to rake up the scandalous chronicle of those who have long answered for their gross iniquity before God's judgment-seat, and are now, either expiating it in burning flames, or weeping over it, so far as tears are permitted to the saved, because repentant, souls? Are these the topics for religious addresses, or for religious ears? Are they matters to delight in publishing, in a cheap form, with asterisks, and breaks, and inuendos, to convey to the delicate imagination of Protestant ladies, after much unfit for their eye and thought has met them, that there are fouler obscenities concealed, which the clergyman with glib tongue, and unquailing eye, could deliver to his

fifteen hundred hearers, "including a majority of the clergy, and many of the most respectable and influential inhabitants of Bath?" For we are frequently told that what he read, was totally unfit for publication. And what is reading but publishing? Such notes we often find in newspaper reports of judicial proceedings, which cannot shrink from looking into cases of disgusting immorality; but we consider it disgraceful for them to occur in any discourse addressed by a clergyman, to an assembly of Christians.

And here indeed we may be expected to say a few words respecting the Rev. gentleman's claim to credit, when he gives his word for any statement. Twice, before, he has been arraigned before public opinion for unfairness, to say the least, of a most questionable character. One is an old affair, with a fellow-clergyman of his own, the Rev. Mr. Merewether; the other is of more recent date, and refers to his memorable "Mornings with the Jesuits." We must content ourselves with sending our readers to the full exposure of this work in the "Rambler;" where it is demonstrated, that personages, times, and conversations in it, are pure fictions. On these grounds, we consider ourselves justified, *prejudicially*, in doubting any statement about Catholics, which this gentleman may make. He thrice, in his lecture, calls the Rev. Mr. Prynne of Devonport "that unmanly fellow:" (P. 43.) what if that gentleman should retort the compliment?

And now we draw to a conclusion; and we will do so by transcribing the close of the Catholic lecture, as taken down, not indeed with exactness of phrase, but with tolerable accuracy of substance.

"There is too much contradiction in this lecturer,—at one time we are told of the great wealth of convents, and the large dowries taken into them by the nuns, who are ladies of rank and distinction; but when it is wished to depress the character of the inmates, then we are told that 'the great body of the members are of a wholly inferior social position; they are ordinarily of the same class as our inferior tradespeople, as our parish schoolmistresses, and as the nurses in our hospitals.'

"Thank God it is so; because the mixing of the different ranks in a common charity, is a safeguard against the inroads of a proud and haughty spirit. When I find the noble dame, and the first amongst the fair in the land,

entering upon her humble walk, side by side with one who may have been her servant, I think it is a great triumph of religion, which thus works out, irrespective of social rank and position, the highest Christian virtues, and can combine the great and the little together, in a common undertaking of holy charity. It makes too the religious state, not a dreamy and abstract sort of existence—a romantic life of enthusiasm and poetry, in which one lives amidst the fleeting visions of imaginary perfection, and piety and vanity are mixed together; but a real and practical condition of life. For when persons of the class of our ‘inferior tradespeople,’ enter our nunneries, and engage in the religious state, you may be sure there is energy and vigour of life within our convents. You cannot get persons of the class of our inferior tradespeople, to enter, where there is nothing but romance and poetry. Depend upon it there is the work of the hands, and the vigour of sound health within, where you get people of that station to enter.

“I should wish to conclude by making an appeal to the better feelings of that portion of my audience, who are being carried away by a singular perversity of feeling, to become the enemies of what may justly be considered the very pride of their sex.

“I hear of meetings of ladies, whose object is, to open the doors of all convents, and to give the power of inspection to magistrates and commissioners. I will not believe that the mere current of their own sentiments would lead them to this; but surely their best feelings must have been sadly worked upon, before they could give their sanction to such a proposal as that magistrates, a class not always composed of spotless characters, perhaps mere hunting squires—perhaps bigoted clergymen—should be at liberty to go to the habitations of ladies, who have purchased the property for their own abodes, and choose to live there, with other English ladies; and that these officials should have the power of calling every member of the community before them, as they would the inmates of the workhouse, or of subjecting them to an inspection and examination, as though they were patients of a lunatic asylum—that they should search every nook of their dwelling, and pry into the most private apartments of their abode. The ladies of this city surely cannot be advocates of such a proceeding! Yet they have been so worked upon, that they think they are fighting the battle of their sex, and of religion, in

demanding it. O! shame on us! shame upon our age! shame upon our country! that we should be exposed to the feelings of almost contempt, which these meannesses have brought upon us in foreign lands!

“As long as the attack was against men, as long as we were called invaders, aggressors, and much else, we bore it without complaint. It becomes men to fight the battle of their honour with honourable weapons, and the battle of religion, with such means as religion supplies. But when this public excitement, this fanaticism, is turned away from us, upon those little, weak, defenceless societies of women, it is unworthy of a nation which prides itself upon high chivalric sentiments; but more especially does it not become those to join in the cry whose hearts and sympathies ought to be with their own sex, and in the defence of its unblemished character.

“But it is said, what practical purpose of true religion can this conventual system serve? What need is there of communities of nuns to carry on the work of benevolence and charity? They do no more, we are told, than any lady ought to do; and living and active Christianity is manifested by the ladies of this city, in giving instruction to the poor, in plunging into the cellars and haunts of poverty, to relieve the needy and comfort the sick.* Such may be, and are, no doubt, works of benevolence and charity, in which many are engaged; and whatever may be my belief upon theological questions, I heartily concur in any praise of such conduct, and in believing that families of clergymen, and of the wealthy, may, and often do, scatter many blessings upon the poor.

“But to say that no man, or woman, should rise above the ordinary level of virtue, is what I cannot admit. It must be remembered, that in every virtue, there is the ordinary sphere of duty, and there is a higher degree which raises the individual into the hero. It is common to many men to stand up for their own rights; but it is given to few to be defenders of the rights of nations; and whilst we commend the daily courage of the many, they are rare who rush into the storm of danger, and strive and battle for their country or their race, till they are hailed as their heroic champions. Woman’s mission is elsewhere. The gentle works of charity and kindness, are those in which are

* First Lecture p. 29.

to be found her heroism. There are depths of charity, my friends, to which you cannot all descend ; there are heights to which you cannot soar ; and rejoice, therefore, that there are those of the female sex who can descend or soar to the deepest depths, or the loftiest heights.

“ It is not long since a poor Frenchman, in London, was seized with virulent small pox. He was alone in a strange land, with no relations near. Those in whose house he lay dare not approach him ; it was death to do so ! What mother then, I ask, would have been justified in visiting that poor man, and in bearing back infection to her family ? What daughter would have been warranted to enter that abode of misery, to take back death to her fond parents, or to the rest of the little ones ? Who then could perform the necessary offices of charity for that wretched man ? It was the Sister of Mercy ! Not one sister either, but many. That sister whose duty it was especially to attend upon that poor stranger, took the disease, and sickened and died, after weeks of suffering—she died the victim of Christian heroism. During her illness, her superior watched over her with a mother’s care ; and though it was felt that her life was more valuable than hers whom she watched over—though she might be justly called a choice flower—that superior refused to confide the duty to another. She herself took the disease, and we feared for her life ; and it was not until after an illness of many days, that she was pronounced out of danger. So virulent was the complaint, that when I went to visit that good and admirable lady, I was not allowed to enter the house, because they were afraid I should take the contagion. There, my brethren, was a case in which Sisters of Charity and Mercy were required, and in which none other would do. I could mention the cholera again. Oh how many cases of devotedness like this, how many instances of misery and wretchedness relieved, might I not relate to you, as having occurred during the period of that pestilence, in which the instruments of mercy, and the Christian heroines, were our Sisters of Mercy. And not a few fell victims, or rather martyrs, of their charity.

“ I call on you, then, to be just, if you will not be kind, and to insist that not a word be spoken against these defenceless but high-minded, and virtuous, and Christian women, unless evidence be produced such as would satisfy a court of justice of the charges against them. You will

not allow even your criminals to be condemned without proof: you would not permit even a mitigated punishment to be inflicted, without guilt being established. Will you, then, condemn women, whose lives are devoted to works of religion and charity, without the proof you demand for your criminals? Oh, my friends, consider; is it not become popular, to raise a cry against those who have fixed their love upon that, and devoted their lives to that, which they believe to be most pleasing to God; is it not become popular to raise an excitement against these persons, and to create such feelings in the breasts of the people, as you are told, should not be satisfied until these nuns are persecuted or banished, or subjected to the not less annoying and worrying system of a government inspection? I entreat you, then, be just; and insist that no charge be made unless it be proved.

“In conclusion, I shall be satisfied if I have succeeded, by these remarks, in removing some of those prejudices which have been attempted to be excited amongst you. I shall be satisfied with having given up this portion of my time, and I shall not regret having tried your patience so long, if you bear away with you a spirit of justice, and a determination that none shall be oppressed.”







